

No. 261
SEPT. 8, 1917

NEW

6 CENTS

Buffalo Bill Weekly

DEVOTED TO
FAR WEST LIFE

BUFFALO BILL'S WITCHCRAFT



NEW BUFFALO BILL WEEKLY

Devoted To



Far West Life

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Single Copies or Back Numbers, 6c. Each.

3 months. 75c. | 6 months \$1.50 | 2 copies one year \$5.00
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No. 261.

NEW YORK, September 8, 1917

Price Six Cents.

BUFFALO BILL'S WITCHCRAFT; OR, PAWNEE BILL AND THE SNAKE AZTECS.

By the author of "BUFFALO BILL."

CHAPTER I.

WILD BILL.

When Wild Bill Hickok galloped into the town of Tinijas, word had come that Baron von Schnitzenhauser was in serious trouble there. On the way in he had looked for a dark-cheeked, dark-eyed young woman, Donna Isabel, who had delivered that word, and had not found her.

The pistol king drew rein in front of the leading hotel of the place, kept by a man known as Tinijas John. Throwing the reins to a Mexican boy, he strode with clinking spurs into the hotel barroom.

His question to Tinijas John, who was behind the bar, was purposely a bold one:

"Can you tell me if there is a chink joss house in this town?"

Tinijas John surveyed the man before him, ran his eyes from the clinking silver spurs to the braided velvet jacket, then to the Stetson topping the well-shaped head and long hair. En route, it may be mentioned, he did not fail to note the handsome revolvers on the hips of the stranger nor the gold-mounted bowie knife in its sheath. In his estimation, Wild Bill, whom he had never met before, was something of a dandy.

But though up to that moment he had never set eyes on Wild Bill, Tinijas John was not caught napping. He knew instinctively that this handsome borderman was one of Buffalo Bill's party.

"Wherever there is a lot of chinks," he said, "there is likely to be a joss house, to be shore; but I ain't never heard of one here in Tinijas. What made you ask?"

"I'm interested in such a thing," said Wild Bill, leaning carelessly against the bar. "A chink is sure a queer animal. As Bret Harte maintained, 'the heathen Chinese is peculiar.' By the way," his eyes flicked round the room, "since I'm here, I'll ask another question: Have you happened to see a butterball of a Dutchman, toddling along on very thin legs? A man in your position bumps up against about every odd sample of humanity that

straggles into the town, and if you've ever seen that Dutchman, you couldn't miss remembering it."

A queer look flitted across the face of the hotel keeper, which was not lost on the keen-eyed man who was watching him.

"I haven't seen your Dutch friend," he declared; yet, as he pulled down a bottle, his hands shook. "What will you have?" he invited.

"Nothing; this is not my day. Just one more inquiry: Tell me how I can reach the Casino?"

Tinijas John shot him another sharp look.

"Turn the corner below, and keep going. You can't miss it. Walk five minutes; then look for a big sign, with the name on it; that'll be it. But it's too early for the show."

Wild Bill threw a coin on the bar.

"To pay you for your trouble," he said, and went out.

"That will stir up the animals," was his thought. "Now for the Casino."

Throwing a glance over his shoulder as he walked on, he saw that Tinijas John had run to the window of the barroom on that side, and was looking out at him.

At the Casino he asked for the manager.

"It's about an actress," he said, when the doorkeeper hesitated.

The manager, an alert young fellow in loud clothes, came down.

"Something I can do for you?" he said.

"Take me up into one of your back rooms," Wild Bill requested. "I'd like to have a talk with you there."

"Something important? You mentioned an actress, I believe?"

"You are shy one actress, I think."

"I am, and it's a queer thing; if you know anything about her, I'm willing to talk with you."

"We'll discuss that in the back room."

Up a stairway the manager led, and conducted Hickok to one of the small wine rooms lying back of the Casino stage. The place, at that hour, was deserted.

"We can talk quiet enough here," remarked the manager, as he flung open a door. "Just step in there."

The room was small and scantily furnished; it had but a few chairs, some lamps, and a small wine table in the middle of the floor. Wild Bill dropped into one of the chairs.

"Did you see a fat Dutchman come up here a couple of nights ago?" he inquired. "If you did, he's a friend of mine; and he's missing, too, like your actress." He smiled. "Perhaps it's an elopement. The actress I'm thinking about was called Donna Isabel; she is very dark—Spanish and Indian, I believe; I understood she had an act here—dancing and singing."

"She hasn't shown up for two nights," was the answer; "and I don't understand it; she was my best card. About the Dutchman, I haven't seen him."

"He came here, and I have reason to think he dropped out of sight here."

"I'm sure I don't know anything about it. He might have been robbed and slugged. Tinijas is a tough place."

"You haven't been here long?"

"Less than a month. I hire the Casino of Tinijas John, the owner; he's the proprietor of the hotel up the street. But about that woman?"

"She was out in the country, a mile or so from here, and she brought word that the Dutchman, whom she had met here, had got into trouble; it was in one of these small rooms. So," he looked the manager straight in the face, "I thought I'd come right to headquarters and make my inquiries about him. But I can see that you don't know anything."

"Not a thing."

"I believe you; you're honest, but you've fallen in with a bad crowd." Wild Bill cocked an ear at one of the partitions. "I was followed to this point," he said calmly, "and the fellow who followed me is now hiding in the room next to this. He was sent by Tinijas John. I'll bet that I'm right. Will you go me?"

A light step sounded in the adjoining room; Hickok's words had been heard, as he had meant them to be, and the eavesdropper was getting away.

Making a jump, Wild Bill rushed to the door of the room, but found it locked. When he had smashed against it, and broken the lock, he saw that the room was empty; but the spy had gone so hurriedly that he had not been given time to close the door by which he had fled.

"See you later," Wild Bill flung at the astounded manager, and flickered through the second door, in hot pursuit.

But when he gained the street below, where he thought the man ought to be seen, no man running was in sight; and the men he did see there showed no such interest as might have been expected if the fleeing rascal had dashed past them.

"Round number one; but I think I drew blood."

Wild Bill backed against a wall, where he quietly lighted a cigar and began to watch the street.

CHAPTER II.

FOLLOWING THE CHINK RAT.

A characteristic quality of Wild Bill Hickok was recklessness. Having undertaken to find the baron, he had gone about it in a manner to bring speedy results, without considering the danger it might toss him into.

Buffalo Bill and his friends had come to Tinijas to run down a band of opium smugglers, with whom Tinijas John was connected. It was a moral certainty that the Chinamen in the place were mixed up in the smuggling. And the baron had been seen last, in an unconscious condition, in one of the wine rooms at the Casino. This news had been brought to Buffalo Bill by the Casino dancing girl, Donna Isabel; her motive being hatred of a man named Granger, who, though sheriff of the county, was one of the smuggler leaders.

The reader will be able to see now why Wild Bill had made his bold play. Some member of the opium-smuggling gang had fallen afoul of the German. Hence Tinijas John would be sure to put spies at the heels of the man who had come seeking information.

It was Wild Bill's idea to spot the spies and follow

them. This he expected would lead to immediate developments, and perhaps to the baron himself.

At the end of five minutes, Wild Bill's watching seemed about to be rewarded. A door opened in a wall on the other side of the street, as if moved by hidden springs, and a blue-bloused Chinaman, appearing suddenly, dived into it and out of sight.

Wild Bill smoked placidly at his cigar, and stared at the door, which remained open.

"Chink spells opium—probably. No, by gorry, in this instance it spells rat!" His eyes rounded. "And what a rat!"

A rat as big as a flour barrel had come sliding into view behind the wall, went sliding past the open door, and disappeared.

"Now I can look for a cat, and it ought to be as big as an elephant. If I didn't know better, I might think I had 'em, and had 'em bad. If old Nomad was here, he'd call this whiskizos."

As nothing more happened, and the door remained open, Wild Bill concluded to investigate the giant rat.

"This is chink business, all right," he thought, as he moved toward the door; "and if I follow the chinks, I may get right into the heart of the opium mystery, and strike hands with the baron. There is some sort of hocus-pocus going on back there, and I'd like to know what it is."

On reaching the door, and looking through, he saw the rat again. He was given a better view of it, and discovered that it was mounted on wheels, with a rope end passing through a ring in its nose, by which it was pulled along. But he did not see the men who were pulling it; the rope reached on into the darkness of a narrow passage, its farther end invisible.

Wild Bill began to follow the rat; but he did not come up with it at once; it began to move more rapidly, as if it knew that it was being pursued.

At length it whisked through a doorway, and was gone, the door whipping into place on swinging hinges behind it.

Pushing the door open, Wild Bill found himself unexpectedly confronted by a peculiar scene: The rat had stopped in the middle of a small room hung round with Chinese curtains and lighted by Chinese lanterns. The scurrying heels of vanishing Chinamen twinkled at the opposite side of the room, and vanished behind one of the curtains. A Chinese drum thumped, like a jumping heart. Then, from one side of the room, a dragon crawled, with red, distended mouth, advancing upon the rat as if to devour it.

Wild Bill shifted his cigar, rubbed his nose, and scratched his chin.

"No, I ain't dreaming; I'm not suffering from any delirium tremenjus, and I don't believe in whiskizos, even if Nomad does. So, what I am seeing I'm seeing; but, by gorry, it's a funny go! Maybe if little Willie keeps still enough, he will see something worth while. My guess is that this is one of the first acts in a Chinese drama, or perhaps some rite in Chinese freemasonry. Lay on, Macduff!"

But nothing happened.

The dragon had come to a stop close by the rat. It was made of Chinese paper, wonderfully colored. It had been given a push, apparently, strong enough to send it into the center of the room. But the men who had pushed it did not appear.

When ten minutes had passed, with nothing doing, Wild Bill's curiosity got the better of his discretion. He walked out into the queer room, and up to the big rat and the dragon. Then he saw that the rat had a door in its back, set like the hatch of a ship.

Shifting his cigar again, he regarded the rat curiously.

"In Troy, I believe, a wooden horse came in, and it was filled with enemies. That wasn't Troy, New York, of course; everybody is friendly there! If there is anything in this rat, under that hatch, it may be opium."

He slipped the hasp.

It was as if he had signaled, for the hidden drum boomed, the door in the back of the rat flew open, and a Chinaman, rising like a jack-in-the-box, pitched at the daring white man. At the same moment, doors concealed by the curtained walls flew inward, and a mob of

Chinamen were flung into the room pell-mell, and came dashing upon him.

Wild Bill dropped a hand to one of his revolvers as the jack-in-the-box Chinaman clutched at his throat, but he was knocked over, and he and the Chinaman rolled on the floor together.

Under any ordinary conditions Wild Bill Hickok was the equal of any three men that might have been pitted against him, and he could be expected to take care of twice as many Chinamen; but when the Chinamen numbered nearly a score, the odds were too great.

He realized this, stopped his resistance, and lay, panting, on the floor, with Chinamen clinging to him as the Lilliputs clung to Gulliver.

"Let up," he growled, not at all pleased with himself. "I'm a fool, and I know it; but, by gorry, you don't need to kill me for it; the world is full of fools, and the fool killer is asleep! Let up!"

Some of them still clung to him—a half dozen in number; the others ringed round him, and shot questions at him in a bewildering sort of pidgin English.

Wild Bill freed himself with a thrashing flounce, and backed against the wall, though he had not yet been able to get on his feet. He discovered that his revolvers and his knife were gone, which was, no doubt, a good thing, as he might have tried to use them, and certainly that would have brought his death.

"Don't all talk at once," he grumbled. "I can't understand you—see? If there's any one here who can speak decent English, now is his chance to demonstrate it and cover himself with glory."

They ceased their chatter, that they might hear him.

"As I said," he explained, "I'm a fool; nobody knows that better than I do now. I butted in here, where I had no business to come. You were having a bit of chink freemasonry is my guess; or perhaps something in the line of Chinese drama. It's queer stuff—Chinese drama. That made you mad. I suppose the fellow who was hid in the rat was billed to hop out at the psychological moment, and put a few crimps in the tail of the dragon; things like that happen in a Chinese play, I'm told. If so, and I interfered at the wrong moment, I beg your pardon."

"Who you name?" was shot at him.

The hidden drum thumped, and the Chinese looked at each other; two of them started hastily from the room.

"If I told you my name," said Wild Bill, "you wouldn't know it. When I'm called right, it's J. B. Hickok; but generally it is Wild Bill; sometimes it's the pistol king. But for you, I reckon, any other Bill would sound as sweet."

"Why you come?" was next demanded.

"I've told you already—I came because the fool killer was havin' his noonday siesta; but, to make it plainer, I came because I saw a door open, and that big rat whisk by in a way to make me want to follow it."

"Dool open?"

That apparently startled them; one of them jumped away, as if he went to close it.

"A Chinaman came in here, through that door, from the street out there, and left the door open; then the rat came along, and I followed the rat. Sabe?"

"Me sabe," said the spokesman, but he did not say it kindly.

"So, if it's all the same to you, I'll take my hat, which I see over there, and my weapons, and I'll bid you good-by."

His air was as bland as it could be, after his rough treatment, but he did not get the consent he had asked for, and he had not expected that he would get it.

The hidden drum sounded again.

Wild Bill knew now that it sounded signals. The Chinamen started and looked round, as if this drumbeat astonished them; then, without more ado, they flung themselves on the man before them, and, beating down his resistance by the very force of numbers, they made him a prisoner.

"It began as a farce, and seems to be ending as a tragedy," Wild Bill grumbled, as he sat crouching against the wall, his hands and feet bound.

He looked into the glaring eyes of the Chinamen who surrounded him.

Then his nonchalant air returned.

"Oh, it's all right; have your way. I see my cigar over there, burning the tail of your rat; with your permission, if you'll give it to me, I'd like to finish it."

CHAPTER III.

THE CAPTURE OF DONNA ISABEL.

The thin-faced, white-eyed man stood looking at Donna Isabel. He had entered her room at the hotel kept by Tinijas John while she was throwing her belongings into a trunk in preparation for leaving the town. His manner was threatening, and, when he drew a revolver on her, the girl's dark cheeks blanched.

"It won't do you no sort of good to put up a holler," he said brutally. "The winder is down and fastened, and if you should holler, and bring any one, it would only be Tinijas John."

"What do you want?" she gasped.

"That's better," he said, relieved. "I was afeared you'd throw a fit or two, and make trouble for me. Might as well take it cool, you see."

He edged carefully to a chair, and lowered himself into it, keeping her covered with the revolver, while his whitish eyes searched her face.

"But," she stammered, "I—I thought—you were a prisoner."

He coughed out a hard laugh.

"That's what Buffalo Bill thought, and the rest o' that gang; but, y' see, I ain't; not now. They had me, and they had Granger with your help; an' they was already figgerin' us on the way to the Yuma penitentiary; but I reckon we ain't goin' to see it this trip."

"You escaped?" she gasped.

"No, not exactly. They was bringin' us into town. You know how it was; Granger and me and Wilson and some more got trapped, out at the chink mine, while we was tryin' to trap Cody's crowd. Granger's deal would 'a' gone through all right, too, if 't hadn't been for you; and Buffalo Bill's crowd would be now layin' out, deader'n nails by that mine. You got word to 'em, and they turned the trick on us. It was kinda low-down business on your part."

Her pallor became more pronounced.

"Granger thinks it was, and I reckon he won't forget it. That's why I'm here. But you asked how we got away. Well, some of the boys from the town done it. They jumped in on Cody's gang as we was bein' brought in, and took us away frum 'em. There was a nasty fight; Wilson was killed, and some of Cody's men."

"Who?" she said.

"None o' the main guys, I'm sorry to say. Some of the chinks they was bringin' along with us was also killed. It was a hot fight while it lasted. The bodies was brought in a while ago, chinks and all. And to-night, by the light o' the moon, there's goin' to be a high old chink funeral, out on the hill above the town."

"Where is Granger?" she asked.

"I dunno, but if I did I wouldn't tell you. All you need to know is that I'm workin' on his orders. You threw him down," he added harshly; "threw down the whole gang, and you can't expect that you won't suffer for it."

She started to rise from her knees by the trunk, where his revolver had held her; but when she saw it pointing straight at her bosom, and caught the wicked gleam of his whitish eyes, her courage failed, and she sank back.

"Better not," he advised.

"Wh-what are you going to do with me?" she gasped.

"Personal," he vouched, "I ain't goin' to do nothin' to hurt ye, if you're willin' to obey orders and keep quiet. Otherwise——"

"Yes?" Her voice choked.

"Otherwise—you git this. I've got my orders. You're to go with me, and keep still."

"And you will take me to Granger?"

"Mebbeso; I dunno; but not straight to him, anyhow. First, you're goin' into the chink prison pen. You know where it is—up behind the idol room."

The chilling fear that swept through her made her teeth chatter.

"Yes, I know," he said, "it skeers you. It's where they put the chinks they're goin' to bowstring; but you needn't be afraid of that. Granger is goin' to take you back to the Snake Aztecs, and turn you over to them."

The color came back into her face.

"That won't be so bad, eh?" he said, observing her closely. "Well, accordin' to Granger, it'll be a heap sight worse when you git there. Aire you ready to go with me now, without any female high-strikes?"

"See here," she said, in a pleading tone, her voice trembling. "This is rather a poor return, don't you think, for the favor I did you?"

He glanced at his left shoulder, and stretched out his left arm; he had difficulty in using the arm.

"It might be," he admitted, "under some conditions."

"Pawnee Bill had captured you," she reminded, "and had you tied hand and foot in Granger's shanty; and I cut the cords and let you go free. I think you owe me something for that."

"Not now," he grunted. "Y' see, what you done afterward cancels all that; anyway, I got to do w'at the gang says, and you threw the gang down; I ain't responsible for that, and I got to obey orders."

"Does Tinijas John know of this?" she asked.

"Tinijas John?" He snorted. "He knows I'm in this room right now, and he's waitin' to help me, if I tip him the word; but Tinijas, y' see, don't want to show his hand open if he can help it. Tinijas allus works underground; he's the mole gopher of this outfit."

"I suppose I'll have to go with you," she said. "But I'd like to know just what I'm to expect."

His sinister laugh sounded.

"You'll have company. You've seen the critter they call Wild Bill? Well, he's to be with you."

"One of Buffalo Bill's men!"

"Yes, he's goin' along; he's waitin' for you now in that room I mentioned."

His face shriveled into what he considered a merry smile.

"He's one o' these hyer smart guys. You reck'lect that Buffalo Bill's Dutchman got into trouble; he was captured, accidental, by the Chinamen; and they railroaded him out to the mine, without knowin' it, in a wooden case that I reckon they thought held tea. Not knowin' that, but knowin' from you that the Dutchman was in trouble, Cody fired his friend Wild Bill into Tinijas here, to find out what had happened to the fool. That's where Wild Bill fell down. He got into a room where some of the mystery work of the chinks was goin' on; and they found him there, and nailed him. And now he is in that room; and he'll make the trip with you. So, as I said, you're goin' to have company."

"Does Buffalo Bill know that?" she queried.

"I dunno; but I think not."

"Because, if he does, it spells trouble for you," she declared, "and for Granger. Granger is a fool if he doesn't see that."

"I reckon not—when we get Wild Bill out where the Snake Aztecs can toy with him; they ain't gentle, you know."

He arose, still clutching the revolver.

"I don't see no use in playin' up to you what ain't so," he said. "The question is now: aire you goin' quiet, or do I have to call in Tinijas John?"

From the tray of her trunk she took a purse and drew out of it a diamond ring.

"This is yours, Hawkins," she said, "if you'll fall down on this job; it's worth five hundred dollars, and it will bring three hundred in any pawnshop. Take it, and let me slip out by the back way; then report to the scoundrels who sent you that I was gone when you got here."

He shifted uneasily, eying the shining ring.

"I couldn't do it," he said; "f'r, y' see, Tinijas knows I'm hyer, an' he knows that you aire hyer; it'd be my finish."

"Then," she added, "take the ring, and let me jump

past you; you can fire off your revolver, and miss me, and tell them that I got away."

"I'll look at the ring," he said.

She tossed it to him.

In catching it, he dropped the revolver into his lap, using his right hand, as his left arm was stiff and sore from the wound received when Pawnee Bill flung his knife into it.

The woman made a jump for the door as the revolver was lowered.

But she did not reach it; he thrust out his foot, and she came, sprawling, to the floor.

"I expected that trick!" he snarled, catching up the revolver again. "You lay there quiet, or I'll put a bullet through yer head."

He had the ring now in his left hand, and, after eying it, thrust it into his pocket.

"I'll jes' keep it," he said.

"You villain!" she screamed at him.

"Compliments like them don't break no bones," he urged. "If cusses could make a man black and blue, I've had enough flung at me by Granger an' others to turn me into a blue nigger; so, y' see, I don't mind."

"You are a villain!" she panted, in her impotent fury; "you have no more gratitude than a block of wood, or you would remember the favor I did you."

"Oh, I remembers it," he admitted; "the only trouble is that ain't goin' to do you no good."

He shuffled past her, and made sure that the door was locked.

"If you smash that winder, and pitch out into the street," he said, "you'll only break yer fool neck; so you won't try that. Now, hold out yer hands."

"You're going to tie me?" she gasped.

"Frum that break you made, I reckon I got to; I can't afford to take chances. Hold 'em out."

"I refuse," she said. "I'll call for help."

Her scream arose, angry and frightened, but it was stopped by the fingers of the white-eyed man clutching her by the throat.

She fought him tigerishly with her nails, and struggled to free herself. But her strength was not great enough; he forced her against the wall, choked her until she gasped for breath, and, while she was half unconscious, he slipped cords round her wrists and knotted them with quick dexterity.

Having done that, he thrust a handkerchief gag into her mouth, and fastened it there by tying the ends of the handkerchief behind her head.

She was now almost in a fainting condition, so was rendered helpless.

"Will you walk," he snarled at her, "or have I got to kerry you?"

She mumbled a furious answer.

"Oh, all right; I'll kerry you. And I'll hammer you on the head if you try to kick up a row."

He caught her in his strong arms and staggered out of the room. As he did so, a face peeped at him over a banister.

"It's all right, Tinijas," he whispered. "I reckon thar ain't goin' to be no further trouble. You jes' watch fer the B. B. crowd out by the front. They shacked into town an hour ago, b'ilin' over with excitement, and they'll make gun play if they know what's goin' on. You got to blind 'em, if you can."

The face of Tinijas John slipped back out of sight; his caution was so great that he did not even speak.

CHAPTER IV.

BUFFALO BILL'S SEARCH.

On his return to Tinijas, Buffalo Bill's chagrin and irritation were greater than words can fitly express. In the moment of a noteworthy victory he had lost its fruits.

Jim Granger, treacherous sheriff of Conejos County, arrested for being a leader of the opium smugglers, was free again. So was his chief lieutenant, Sim Hawkins, known as White-eyed Hawkins, one of the greatest rascals of the border.

Granger had requested Buffalo Bill to come to his aid

*For a full account of the incidents mentioned and many others, see last week's issue, "Buffalo Bill's Opium Case."

in running down the opium smugglers. That had been a blind, to cover up Granger's own wickedness. He had tried to steer the scout's party into a Chinese mining building, or in front of it, where they could be slaughtered; it having been his intention, then, to claim that certain desperado Chinese had done the killing. The plan had been turned against him; he had fallen into his own trap.

But as he and his fellow prisoners were being conveyed to Tinijas, a strong force of his friends had dashed in on horseback, put up a stiff fight, and he and Hawkins had been rescued.

A fearful toll had been paid by the rescuing party; five of their men were dead. Several Chinamen, held as prisoners by Buffalo Bill's party, had also fallen. And Buffalo Bill had lost three men; though fortunately not one of the three was his personal friend.

The king of scouts had two bullet holes through his hat, to remind him of the fight; old Nomad had a "burned" spot on his shoulder, where a bullet had passed, and Little Cayuse had lost his eagle feather, which was a great grief to him, and gave him a nervous fear of the future. Pawnee Bill had escaped unscratched, and so had Schnitzenhauser.

"It's too bad, necarnis," said Pawnee Bill; "but, you see, though we have lost Granger, we have struck a blow that will halt this opium smuggling. Granger is foot-free, and he'll get out of the country, and so will Hawkins and all that crowd. The bad men of Tinijas will go into hiding. You can bet, necarnis, that the widespread smuggling along this border has been given its knock-out."

"You're kind, Gordon, to want to make it easy for me; I can see how you feel about it," Buffalo Bill answered. "But you're too generous. I ought to have had a stronger force."

"You expected to rely on Granger's force, you know."

"Ah, that is where I blame myself; I relied on Granger too long, and he turned out to be a scoundrel."

"He was the sheriff, and it was his business to direct you; so, if he went wrong that puts no sort of blame on you," Pawnee Bill urged.

Buffalo Bill smiled.

"You're like Hickok, Gordon; too generous by half when you come to estimate your friends."

"Speakin' o' Hickok," broke in old Nomad, "I admits thet, since this hyer ruction, I ain't been easy in my mind. He went inter Tinijas ter see what had happened ter ther baron, and ther baron is hyer, wi' us, right side up; and Wild Bill, we don't know whar he is."

"In the town, of course," assured Pawnee Bill.

"In trouble, too, mebbeso; otherwise et looks like he'd have come back. Thet town is a bald hornets' nest right now, you can bet, 'count o' what has happened; an' whar thar's trouble afoot, yer know Wild Bill Hickok jes' cain't keep outer et."

"Don't worry, old diamond," said Pawnee Bill. "You can be sure that Wild Bill knows how to take care of himself."

The few prisoners they still held, nearly all Chinamen, were being herd-driven in the trail ahead of them. The dead Chinamen and dead white men had been sent on, strapped to the backs of ponies, with another party. With that party had gone the woman, Donna Isabel. Buffalo Bill and those still with him had delayed at the mine to search it for opium, of which a few cases had been found.

Night was at hand as they entered Tinijas, and it was at once seen that the place was seething with excitement. Granger had many friends; besides, the ramifications of the smuggling fraternity were of unknown extent. A crowd gathered and made angry demonstrations. But Buffalo Bill's party pushed straight on toward the center of the town, brushing the angry men aside with scant ceremony.

A Chinese laundry received the bodies of the dead Chinamen, an array of excited chinks having gathered there for the purpose. The bodies of the white men were turned over to an undertaker.

Buffalo Bill and his companions turned back to Tinijas John's, after surrendering their prisoners to the town authorities. Ostensibly this movement upon Tinijas John's

was because it was the best hotel in the town; the real reason was they knew that Tinijas John was one of the smugglers, though no proof on that point was then obtainable, outside of the word of Donna Isabel.

Tinijas John received them courteously; he was too shrewd to do otherwise. And they were given the best rooms and the best service the house afforded.

"Wild Bill Hickok didn't call on you to-day?" Buffalo Bill inquired, as he put his name on the register.

"If he did," said Tinijas John cautiously, matching wits with this keen-brained man, "I didn't know it was him; people comes and goes all the time hyer, to be sure; so he might 'a' drifted in and drifted out again. His name ain't on that register."

Yet something in the words and in the manner of the man informed Buffalo Bill at once that Tinijas John had seen Wild Bill.

After supper, Buffalo Bill and his friends went down into the street, which was filled with armed men. Who was friend and who was foe could not be determined.

Baron von Schnitzenhauser, who turned up at the hotel, was now the guide.

"Fairst," he said, "ve vill go py der Casino in."

The performance in the Casino was beginning when they entered it. But instead of seeking seats, they followed the baron to the wine rooms at the rear of the house.

"Idt iss here," said the baron, stopping before the door of one of the rooms, "vare I haf der peginnings oof my sdrange inexberiences. I come py dhis room in, mit der vomans; idt iss py der special inwidation; unt she order some vine, vot I haf to bay for. Vhen I trink idt, I ton'dt know notting afdhervards; unt I vake oop in a Shinese joss house, vot musdt pe somevheres near."

Buffalo Bill sent for the manager of the Casino, and asked if he knew where the joss house was to be found.

"In the other building, across the street," he said. "There is a door in the wall—you can see it from this window; when you get through that you are to look for an underground passage. I've never been there, but I have heard that much. If you can hit on that passage, it will lead you to the joss house."

They went down, and found the door, which they forced; but they could not locate the underground passage. Some frightened Chinamen whom they encountered professed entire ignorance of it, and, of course, lied; but, for the time, Buffalo Bill was baffled. One thing, however, they learned: the Chinese were making preparations for a hasty burial of their countrymen who had been killed in the fight.

Returning to Tinijas John's, Buffalo Bill inquired for Donna Isabel.

"She's gone," said the proprietor.

"Gone? She arrived here not more than two hours ago," the scout informed him.

"That's right, Cody," said Tinijas John easily; "but she packed her trunk and lit out; I don't know where she went. All I know is that she went up to her room, and I haven't seen her since."

"As there has been no stage out this afternoon, she can't have left the town. I think I'd like a look at that room."

Pawnee Bill went with the scout and Tinijas John upstairs to the room which, Tinijas John said, had been used by Donna Isabel. It was unoccupied.

"You can see that she ain't here, Cody," said Tinijas John, leading the way in. He threw a glance round the empty room. "She lit out, as I told ye."

"And took her trunk?"

"Sure thing; a wagon came to the hotel door and got it."

Buffalo Bill pulled open the door of the little stove and looked into it. It held a number of cigar stubs and half-burned matches, together with some old envelopes. Fishing some of these out, the scout turned to Tinijas John.

"This envelope bears the name of J. B. Martin," he remarked quietly. "Perhaps Donna Isabel was masquerading as a man; that would account, too, for the cigars smoked here. You can see that the smoking was done to-day."

Tinijas John stared and fell back.

"That's funny," he said; "I didn't know that the woman smoked."

Buffalo Bill cast the things back into the stove.

"I am sure she didn't," he said.

Out of the room they went with Tinijas John; then into the street, leaving Tinijas John in the barroom.

"That was a lie he told, of course, necarnis," said Pawnee Bill.

"Yes, he took us to the wrong room. The woman may be in the house this minute. But it is Wild Bill that we are searching for."

Though some of the ruffians in the street would have been only too glad of an opportunity to "do up" the scouts, they were afraid to make the tackle openly. They trailed behind, muttering threats, as Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill took their way along.

Old Nomad had been sent to the livery stables, as it had been discovered that Wild Bill's horse was in one of them. After that he was to make a search for the Mexican boy who had brought the horse in.

Little Cayuse had been sent off to watch proceedings at the chink funerals, for which the Chinamen were making such elaborate preparations. So only the baron remained.

"Oof Hickok iss meedting mit der same inexperience dot I dit, he iss in der chink joss house," he averred. "If I knowed vare idt iss—budt," he finished, with a flourish, "I ton'dt, so vot iss der usefulness?"

As they could not find Wild Bill, could not locate the Chinese joss house, and had failed to discover Donna Isabel, the trio repaired at length to a side street close by the Chinese part of the town, and remained in waiting, to see what they could see of the Chinese funerals and get a report from Little Cayuse.

Nomad was still absent, trying to locate the Mexican boy.

CHAPTER V.

LITTLE CAYUSE'S DISCOVERY.

Two or three hours later, Little Cayuse appeared before them, in a state of bewildered excitement.

They had themselves missed seeing the Chinese funeral cortège wind out of the town in the moonlight for the cemetery hill where the Chinese dead of Tinijas were laid to rest. Nomad had called them away, thinking he was on the trail of the Mexican boy, but he had been mistaken—the boy they found and questioned knew nothing, and they lost much time.

They were in the side street again, with Nomad, where the young Piute had been told to come to them, and he appeared there. He had a new eagle feather in his hair and his eyes were shining. Also, he had what he considered a startling story.

"Meet um bad Injun," he explained, touching the eagle feather proudly.

"And you took away his eagle feather," said the scout. "He was a bad Indian, because he had an eagle feather and you had none."

"Mebbeso me like um have eagle feather," the Piute admitted.

Then he changed his mind about telling how he got the eagle feather.

"You see um box of dead Chinees?" he demanded.

"The Chinese in their coffins? No, we weren't here when the procession started."

"Me see um."

"Yes, I suppose so."

"Up on hill," said Little Cayuse. "You know where um hill is?"

"Yes, where the Chinese cemetery is. You were there?"

"Me foller um Chinees on caballo. But me no sabc somet'ing."

"There was something about it you didn't understand?"

"Wuh!"

"How was it? Tell us about it."

"What um Pa-e-has-ka say, when box of two go on trail?"

"Say that over again."

Little Cayuse repeated it.

"Two of the coffins were not deposited in graves in the cemetery, but were taken out on the trail?"

"Wuh!"

"What trail?"

Little Cayuse swung his head in the direction of it.

"On the trail leading south. Well, what happened then?"

"Um buried."

"The two coffins were buried out by the trail?"

"Wuh! One on top. All same cache!" He swung his hand round, as if smoothing down a mound; then stamped his foot on the ground.

"That's plain enough—eh, Gordon? Two of the coffins were taken out along the trail and buried, one on top of the other; then the place was smoothed over, like a cache."

"Thar's shore suthin' quar erbout thet, though," Nomad declared.

The thought that came into the mind of the king of scouts was startling enough to make him giddy.

"It couldn't have been possible——"

"I'll finish et fer ye," said Nomad. "You're thinkin': What if them coffins held Wild Bill and ther young woman? The chinks wouldn't bury 'em in their own cemetery."

"I won't think that—it's foolish."

"Yet it's a queer thing, necarnis, as Nomad says," declared Pawnee Bill.

"Der kveerest dot I haf heardt yit," said Schnitzenhauser. "Dhis iss a kveer town, unt a chink iss a kveer pitzness, I pedt you; budt Vildt Pill—himmelblitzen, oof idt could have been him!"

"You saw the two coffins buried there," said Buffalo Bill, turning again to the Piute. "Then what?"

"Me take um caballo and come find Pa-e-has-ka."

"You rode back to report it. You weren't seen by the Chinamen, I hope?"

Little Cayuse shook his head.

"No, Pa-e-has-ka."

"Yer can bet on ther Injun ter make a sneak of et, when et's needed," praised Nomad. "But this makes me oneasier than a boy with tight boots. I'm votin' thet we rack out and investergates. But I ain't goin' ter believe thet Wild Bill has been wiped out."

"Now, about the eagle feather?" said Buffalo Bill.

The Piute touched his head ornament proudly.

"Me see um Injun," he explained; "me not know who—strange Injun; him no Piute, no Pawnee, no Apache. Injun come up by Chinees; speak by Chinees; then take um caballo, and ride pronto."

A satisfied smile crackled across his face.

"Injun have um eagle feather—me no have um eagle feather." He dropped a brown hand to the long lariat of horsehair that hung at his belt. "So—me get um eagle feather."

"Waugh!" gulped Nomad. "Yer don't mean et? Yer pitched yer rope at him, and pulled ther eagle feather right outer his ha'r?"

"Wuh!" The Piute's face cracked in a smile again.

"Me rope um eagle feather."

Buffalo Bill smiled, too.

"Gordon," he remarked, "he seems to have you going; that's a feat which would test even your great skill with the reata."

"Injun think him see whiskizos," explained the young Piute. He doubled over with laughter. "He no see um Piute—no see um Piute caballo; no see anything. No know what it is take um eagle feather; think um mebbeso whiskizos. Wuh!"

"Skeerd him inter fits," said Nomad; "and I s'pose he went down thet trail on his hoss like a streak er chain lightning."

"Like um two streaks light'n'; no look back; give um holler." He waved his hands expansively. "Then um gone."

He pulled the eagle feather out of his long, black hair and exhibited it.

"Take a look at it," said Pawnee Bill, with a start of surprise. "If you know what tribe that indicates, necarnis, you're ahead of me."

The feather had been dyed; it had a red tip, then a streak of blue, with the body of the feather black. Pawnee Bill and old Nomad, with the scout, examined it closely by the light of the street lamp.

"Unless it's just an individual notion, that marking tells of a tribe I'm not acquainted with," Buffalo Bill admitted.

"Little Cayuse," he said, "guide us to the place where those two Chinese coffins were buried."

Little Cayuse tucked the feather back in his hair and ran to get his horse.

The other horses, with Schnitzenhauser's mule, were in a livery stable, near the one in which Wild Bill's animal had been located. Some warning instinct made Buffalo Bill now decide to take it along.

"We can use it as a pack animal, in case of need," he said. "If Hickok is still in the town, and requires another, he can get a horse out of the stable."

"Hickok ain't in the town," grumbled Nomad; "I'm bettin' big money he's in one er them coffins."

But he was voicing his fear, rather than his belief.

CHAPTER VI.

A BIT OF MYSTERY.

The full moon was high in the sky when the Piute brought them to the "cache," as he insisted on calling the place where the coffins had been buried by the Chinese.

The double grave, if it was one, had been deftly concealed; first by trampling the earth level with the surface of the ground; then by scattering grass, leaves, and old boughs over the spot in a manner to give it a natural appearance. When these were scraped aside, the fresh soil was revealed.

Old Nomad looked down at the yellow earth with a shiver.

"I don't like et," he admitted. "This hyer ain't no chink graveyard, an' them two coffins warn't buried hyer without a good reason. Ef et should shore prove thet Wild Bill is under this bit o' ground, I'm plum' cert'in ter lose what little sense I've got, an' kill 'steen dozen o' them yaller-bellied Chinamen; I reckon I ain't goin' ter be able ter help et."

Buffalo Bill had no comment to make, as he took the spade that had been brought and gouged it into the earth. The question of what the double grave held had been thrashed out in all its bearings on the way. Nothing was left but to find out if any of their many guesses were right.

Buffalo Bill went down rapidly and skillfully; the ground, freshly placed, was light and easily handled after the first foot of trodden earth had been cast out.

In a little while Pawnee Bill replaced him, insisting on doing his share of the work, and Pawnee Bill was wielding the spade when the point of it touched the first box.

He paused and looked down; the sound of the spade striking the box had been heard by all. After an instant of hesitation, he resumed digging.

When the box was uncovered, it was seen that the Piute had not been mistaken in thinking it a Chinese coffin; it was in the shape of the Chinese caskets for the dead, and it was covered with Chinese letters.

"I haf heardt oof finding goldt, hid mit a blace like dot," hopefully suggested the baron, down on his knees and looking in. "Idt vouldt pe a goodt vay to keeb somepodty from obening der grave vot idt iss su'posed to pe. Oddervise, oof I am making anodder guess, der Chineezers haf puried some chinks here vot haf diedt oof der blague, or der smallbox."

"Waugh! Ther smallpox!" gurgled Nomad, jumping back. "I hadn't considered thet as a likelihood."

"I think," said Pawnee Bill, looking up, "that there has been no smallpox or other contagion in the town."

"So far as ve know," added the baron; "budt ve ton'dt know eferyt'ing, nodt when idt iss der Chineezers."

Buffalo Bill dropped into the grave alongside, and he and Pawnee Bill hoisted an end of the coffin.

"It seems to be empty," he said, astonished.

"Embty! Dhen idt iss not a goldt gache!"

The box was pulled out of the hole.

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill came out after it; and Pawnee Bill pried off the lid with the point of the spade.

The box was empty.

"Vot?" gasped the baron, staring down into the box in the moonlight. "Vot iss der meanness oof dot?"

"You tell me, baron," said old Nomad, who was mightily relieved. "But," he added, looking into the "grave," "mebbeso thar's suthin' in ther other box."

Catching the spade out of the hand of Pawnee Bill, he sprang into the hole in his impatience, and began to throw out the dirt, working feverishly. Almost immediately he uncovered the second box.

When the earth had been removed from the top, and the box was drawn out and opened, it, too, was seen to be empty.

"Vot?" the baron howled again. "Vot iss der foolishness oof dhis pitzness?"

"Waal, thet's what I want ter know myse!f," said Nomad. "Why did ther chinks take the trouble ter bring two empty boxes out hyer an' bury 'em? Thet is ther work o' crazy men, an' I never yit seen er chink what was crazy, though I've met up with a few thet was mighty big fools."

Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill looked at the empty boxes in puzzled wonder. Little Cayuse was frightened; this had an air of that mystery which always frightened him. He was wishing he had not said anything about the buried boxes. In his fear he toyed with his new eagle feather, wondering if it was not bad medicine, and if he oughtn't throw it away.

"Maype, py shinks," guessed the baron, "somedings iss puriedt under der pokes!"

He let himself down into the hole, called for the spade, and began to gopher away, sinking the hole deeper.

"Idt iss beating my dime," he confessed, when the spade struck ground so hard that he knew he was at the bottom of the excavation. "Here iss a hole, mit two coffins in idt, unt nottings else. Vildt Pill iss nodt here, der missing vomans she iss nodt here, unt der goldt he iss not here; aber I am nodt treaming, I am——"

"Anyhow, baron," Nomad interrupted, "yer ain't seein' things; thar ain't nothin' ter see, except two chink coffins an' a hole in ther ground. This is makin' me plum' crazy."

The baron crawled out of the hole with Nomad's assistance; he, too, was dazed.

"I can make somedings oof idt—not," he said to Buffalo Bill.

"We are all in the same boat, baron," the king of scouts confessed. "I don't know what it means. It might pay, though, to set a watch here after we have restored everything to its former condition, and see what happens."

"That's right," Pawnee Bill agreed. "There is a hole in the ladder, of course, though I can't discover it; these coffins weren't brought out here and buried without any reason whatever."

"Yedt I ton'dt know me apowet dot," avowed the baron, shaking his puzzled head. "A chink is a kveer pitzness, I pedt you."

"We'll set a watch, and see," said the king of scouts.

CHAPTER VII.

THE VELVET CLEW.

Leaving Nomad, Little Cayuse, and the baron to fill in the hole and watch beside it, Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill returned to the town.

It seemed reasonably certain that if Hickok had not fallen into serious trouble, he was still in Tinijas, making a quiet search for the baron; as he did not know that the baron had been found at the chink mine, where he had been taken as a prisoner, and was now at liberty.

Also, they believed that Granger had made for Tinijas, after his escape, and was in hiding there. Besides, they wanted to locate the woman, who had dropped out of sight in a manner that suggested evil work.

But they made no progress. The streets were not so filled with people. Tinijas John was still behind his bar, silent and crafty. And the Casino performance was in full blast.

They spent the night in their ineffectual search, and returned to the closed-in grave shortly after daybreak, where they found Nomad and the German crouched in

the bushes, with the horses in concealment some distance off.

"Nothin' doin'," Nomad reported.

"Kvieter as a grafeyard," the baron added; "ve haf vatched der hole der whole nighdt t'rough, unt seen notting. Nomat has peen dot caudious he vould nodd efen ledt me schmoke mine pipe."

"We discovered nothing in the town," the scout informed them. "Wild Bill has simply dropped out of sight. Where is the Piute?"

"Projeckin' round out along the trail," said Nomad. "He struck out on his caballo soon's it was light enough ter see. I'm lookin' for him back now any minute. I'm plum' worried about Hickok."

While they were getting breakfast, the rat-a-tat of the Piute's pony returning was heard. Little Cayuse came in sight at a dead run.

"Ther critter thinks thet he has snagged on ter suthin'," said Nomad, starting up.

When the Piute drew in by them, he produced and held out a small piece of velvet cloth, which they recognized at once.

"Out of Wild Bill's coat," said Buffalo Bill, catching it out of the Piute's hand. "Where did you pick this up, Little Cayuse?"

"By um trail," said the young Indian, his black eyes shining.

"I don't like the look of this, necarnis," said Pawnee Bill gravely; "though I am glad the Piute found it. What do you make of it?"

The bit of velvet was a small, irregular triangle.

"Was it hanging on a bush?" Buffalo Bill asked.

"By um trail," the Piute repeated.

"On the ground, by the trail; then it wasn't torn out by a bush, nor anything like that."

Nomad ran to get his horse, and returned in a minute or so, mounted.

"I'm goin' ter take a look at ther place whar thet was found," he explained. "Mebbeso thar is suthin' more ter be picked up thar."

The others followed him, more slowly, but the Piute accompanied him, to show him where the velvet had been found.

When all had arrived at the spot, Nomad was down in the trail on his hands and knees, inspecting some hoof-prints of ponies.

"Been a wheen of caballos gone along hyer airly las' night," he declared, "toes a-p'intin' toward ther south. Looky hyar."

He indicated the tracks.

Buffalo Bill flung out of his saddle and joined the old trapper.

"You're right," he said.

"An' right hyar is whar ther Piute picked up ther piece o' cloth. Puttin' two an' two tergether, how does et figger out?"

"If Wild Bill was with this party, he must have been a prisoner," said the scout.

"Perhaps he was following them," suggested Pawnee Bill.

Buffalo Bill stood up and looked at his pard.

"Would he have set out on a trail like this, Gordon, without leaving some word for us?"

"It doesn't seem so, does it?" Pawnee Bill admitted. "He would have tried to keep in touch with you. It begins to look as if he was taken along as a prisoner. That would explain why we can't locate him, nor hear from him."

"But who done et?" said Nomad, scratching his grizzled head. "War et ther chinks thet made the false grave back thar?"

Light dawned suddenly on the king of scouts.

"Listen," he said. "I have been struck with an idea. Maybe it is foolish, but it grows on me. Two coffins were brought out and buried back there, with nothing in them. But might there not have been something in them when they were brought out of the town? If so, isn't it just possible that they were buried there empty, simply to conceal them, after whatever was in them had been taken out?"

Old Nomad yelped like a wolf.

"Waugh! Waugh-h! I ketch yer idee. Ther things

thet war in 'em war Wild Bill, and mebbe thet woman! Waugh!"

"Himmelblitzen!" gasped the German. "Vot a headt you haf got, Cody. I am bedtting you ar-re righdt; yaw, dot iss idt! Vildt Pill vos prought oudt here py der coffin in, unt afdher dot he vos taken der coffin oudt. Idt iss a skinch."

"If that is so," said Pawnee Bill thoughtfully, "then he must have been unconscious."

"Unt der vomans she was inkinscious, also-o," the baron added.

"It would seem so; but he was not unconscious when he arrived at this point in the trail," Buffalo Bill reasoned. "This piece of cloth from his coat proves it. He tore it out, and dropped it there, hoping we would find it and understand it."

Little Cayuse had straddled his pony and cantered back to the grave. He was seen to circle round it, his head bent low, his pony on the jump. Having righted himself, he let out an Indian yelp.

"All same caballo track here, Pa-e-has-ka," he announced, when they came up to him. "You see um?"

He pointed out a track similar to one that had been observed in the trail—a track that had a nick in one side, showing that the pony making it had its hoof broken.

The ground round the grave was now gone over as with a fine-tooth comb. Buffalo Bill dismounted, and, with eyes close to the soil, examined it inch by inch. The others aided in the work.

At the end of five minutes there was no sort of doubt remaining that the ponies whose tracks were visible in the trail had been also at this point.

Buffalo Bill voiced the inevitable conclusion:

"It begins to seem that Wild Bill was brought out of the town in one of those boxes. We can take it for granted that he had been rendered unconscious, or it never would have happened. Here he was taken out of the box, restored to consciousness, and put on the back of a pony. If the woman was in the other box, the same can be said of her. No doubt he was tied to the pony, and his hands were tied, perhaps behind his back."

The king of scouts drew from his pocket the triangular piece of velvet.

"This is a smooth piece," he said. "With no seams nor ornamentation; probably it came out of the back of his coat. It was night when the ponies passed down the trail. Our friend Wild Bill is clever. So, my guess is that he succeeded in tearing that out of the back of his coat, even though his hands were tied, and let it drop in the trail, without attracting attention."

"Idt iss a skinch!" the baron bubbled.

"Your reasoning seems to be good, necarnis," Pawnee Bill admitted.

"Der schmugglers haf got him," the baron sputtered. "Iss idt not a reasoning enough? Idt iss Granger, unt—unt der chinks."

"I opine ther baron is shootin' straight," agreed Nomad. "Granger and the Tinijas chinks would have et in fer him, o' course, an' ef they've got him——"

"Idt iss for rewenge."

"Yes, I allow thet's it; they'll have fun wi' him—they'll torture him up some, jes' ter show how they hate him, an' how mean they aire; thet is," he added, with a long breath, "ef we let 'em!"

"Unt der vomans, also-o."

"I reckon," said Nomad, "they're hatin' her wuss'n they aire any of us; I hate ter think erbout et, ef she's a pris'n'r in a chink crowd."

"But—where can they be going?" Pawnee Bill queried.

"Dot iss for us to findt oudt," said the baron. "Who-efer vos going py dhis blace vos sure leafig der town. Dot vouldt pe Granger. Oof he stayed py der town in, he vouldt be exbosed to cabture ag'in; unt so he iss gidt him oudt kvick. And der chinks vot iss in der schmuggling pitzness der same vay; dhey vouldt git oudt. But varefer idt iss dot dhey ar-re going, ton'dt ask me."

"Thet's ter be found out," said Nomad. "Maybe thar's a chink hidin' place out in the hills, an' they're headin' fer et."

It was agreed that this seemed likely.

"Take the trail," Buffalo Bill ordered, speaking to Little Cayuse; "we will be right at your heels."

CHAPTER VIII.

THE BARON GETS A SURPRISE.

Following the pony tracks took them down the southern trail, to the Mexican border, which they reached that night; then beyond it, the next morning, in the direction of the Silverstone Mountains.

Two discoveries, that first day, indicated that they were in the wake of Wild Bill. One was a gold button, pounced on by Nomad, who picked it out of the dirt. There could be no doubt that it was from Wild Bill's velvet jacket. The other was one of Wild Bill's silver spurs, found by the king of scouts at the noon resting place of the band they were following.

There was, of course, a possibility that these had been dropped as "blinds," for the purpose of luring the pursuers farther and still farther from Tinijas. In that event it seemed a certainty that Wild Bill was held as a prisoner somewhere, if he had not been killed; otherwise these objects would hardly have been in possession of the pony riders.

About noon of the second day an Indian was sighted in the Silverstone foothills. As he dropped out of view almost as soon as seen, Little Cayuse and Nomad were sent forward on foot to locate him.

The old trapper went in one direction, the Piute in another, to get the Indian between them. Then Nomad saw him again, crouching behind a ledge, where he was trying to get sight of the white men in the trail.

In spite of the fact that in some ways his years were beginning to tell against him, old Nomad still had eyes as keen as an eagle's. Making a tube of his hands, to cut out the sun glare, he looked the redskin over critically.

"Little Cayuse's find, to be shore," he grunted, with satisfaction; "which ther same is shown by ther fact that he ain't w'arin' ary eagle feather. Little Cayuse hez got et."

He began to study how he could "rake him in."

Creeping forward, he got a bunch of mesquite between himself and the Indian, which enabled him to cover half the intervening distance at fair speed.

After passing the mesquite, there was little else than scattered boulders crowned with cacti to aid his concealment.

Yet in work of this kind old Nomad was so clever that he still made good progress. Only once did the Indian look round, so absorbed was he in watching the white men in the trail; but Nomad sank as lightly to the ground as a falling feather, and passed unnoticed.

Having succeeded in getting behind a cactus-fringed boulder within half a dozen yards of the redskin, the old borderman rose boldly to his feet, and advanced.

It was then that the Indian heard him. Spinning round on his naked heels, and seeing the white man near, he was so astonished that he had not time to get out the knife that was slung at his waist in a belt of rawhide before Nomad was on him.

"Er, wagh-h!"

It was like the snarl of an animal, as the borderman launched himself; the next instant his fingers were tightening round the copper-colored throat of the scantily attired aborigine.

"Lay still, thar!" commanded Nomad, flinging the wheezing Indian to the ground; then he covered him with a revolver. "Ef you don't cut up no tricks, I ain't goin' ter shoot ye."

The redskin rolled into a crouching position beside the rock, and held up his hands.

"Yer aire a wise red," Nomad commented. "Yer aire some shrewd, an' I can't blame ye; but I'm plumb that inoffensive, when things goes my way, thet you needn't be. Jes' hold out yer hands tell I ornaments 'em wi' this here bar-b'are rope."

He took the lariat slung at his side, and bound the hands and feet of the Indian. Then he showed himself on top of the rock, and waved his battered hat.

"Yes, thet brings 'em!" he chuckled.

The party in the trail struck into a gulch as soon as they saw him, and came up the slope at a rather gait, the trained and hardened horses and ponies clanking like

goats. Toofer brought up the rear, mightily belabored by the baron.

From the other direction Little Cayuse bobbed in sight, chagrined by the fact that Nomad had made the capture. He arrived at the top of the rise almost as soon as the others.

"Wuh!" he exploded then, staring at the discomfited redskin. "Me got um feather."

A scowl passed over the face of the captured Indian when he saw his eagle feather in the black braids of the Piute.

"He'll knife ye fer et, too," Nomad warned, "ef he gets ther chance. You'll haf ter look out fer him."

With the Indian in their midst, the party squatted round, while Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and old Nomad began to catechise him, using all the Indian tongues of which they had knowledge.

Little Cayuse took a hand in the linguistic séance, but with no better results.

"Vhy ton'dt you dry him mit English?" demanded the baron, and fired a broadside of what he considered to be that language.

It struck through to the redskin's understanding—that was evident; but it did more—it brought a response that was little less than startling.

"*Sprechen Sie Deutsch!*" the Indian yelled.

The baron jumped as if a knife had been run into him.

"Ja wohl!" he shouted back.

"Waugh!" Nomad squalled, in his amazement. "A Dutch Injun!"

"*Lieber Gott!*" gasped the baron. "Idt iss drue."

Then he yelled a question in his native tongue.

"*Ich bin Amerikaner,*" said the redskin.

"*Amerikaner,*" shrilled the baron. "*Ja, gewiss.*"

The Indian unwound more of the language of the baron's fatherland, to the baron's panting astonishment.

"Idt iss beadt me," he said, turning to his companions. "He ton'dt know enough Cherman so dot idt iss hurting him, but he iss claiming dot he iss an American, pecause he lifs on der American site oof der Mexican line; unt dot he is a friendliness. Vot iss a surbrising to me iss, he iss saying dot vun dime he iss been lifing mit a Cherman, unt got dose moudhfuls oof Cherman vords oof him; vich idt iss a lie, I bedt you. No Cherman oof sensidiveness is efer list mit an Inchun willage."

"Go ahead," said Buffalo Bill, laughing; "ask him some more questions."

The baron complied, prodding away with more German inquiries. When the Indian failed to catch the meaning, the baron shifted to his English; and, after a fashion, by shifting back and forth, he made himself understood.

"Idt iss a funny sdory," he declared, "vot he iss deiling me, unt I pedt you idt iss some lies."

"Enlighten us, baron," Pawnee Bill urged; "don't be so selfish as to keep all the interesting things to yourself."

"In der fairst blace, idt iss a lie dot he sbeaks Cherman; he is know a few vords, unt murders der resdt oof idt!"

"Waal," Nomad drawled, his lips wrinkling with amusement. "He shore deserves credit for thet, baron—ef he murders et; et's a language thet could be spared without tears, ef he should kill et dead!"

"Ach! Fool!" the baron sputtered. "Idt iss der lank-vitch oof indelligence—oof scholars unt uniwersidies; unt you—" His indignation choked his stream of declamation. Nomad dropped back, chuckling.

"Waste your breath on the Indian," Buffalo Bill urged, "and tell us his story."

"Idt iss some lies," said the baron; "budt here idt iss: He iss claiming dot dere iss nodd far off a Inchun city—a vonderful city, mit sdone valls; unt in idt many Inchuns, unt muggs some vich mens unt chinks. Un says dot der chinks vich ve haf been following, haf gone to dhis blace. But—ve cannot find it!"

"Why does he say we can't find it?" Pawnee Bill queried.

The baron shrugged his shoulders.

"I am nodd knowing dot; he ain'dt tell me."

"Ask him if there was a white man, prisoner, with the party that passed along here," suggested Buffalo Bill.

The baron shot the query at the Indian.

"Ach! Yaw; he says der vos a man unt a vomans."

"Then we are on the right track! Ask him some more questions."

The baron flung questions in a shower at the crouching redskin.

"Oof he could dalk petter Cherman, I could find me oudt a goodt deal more," he grumbled; "but when I ask him somet'ings, he say dot I ton'dt sbeak der lankvich vell. T'ink oof idt! Dit you efer heardt der likes oof dot? Me!" He hammered his breast. "Me, a natif Cherman, unt not sbeak der lankvich mit a niceness; *ach, lieber Gott*, idt make me vandt to keel him! Sooch a insuldt!"

"But what does he say?" Buffalo Bill demanded.

"I am delling you."

"But his story—about this city and the prisoners?"

"Von t'ing—he says ve cannodt find idt, pecause he vill nodt show us; oof ve cudt him indo sissage meadt, he vill sdill not show idt. Vot you t'ink oof dot? *Himmel-blitzen*, he is a impudent."

"We can find it," said the scout, "by sticking to the trail of those ponies."

"He haf oxblained apowet how dot iss. Der bonies ve can findt; but dot iss all."

Nomad drew out his knife and ran his finger along the keen edge, eying the redskin.

"I reckon," he said, "I could skeer him into droppin' out all ther knowlidge he is harboring."

If the trapper had such ideas, he knew the king of scouts would not permit even important information to be extracted by torture, and the smile on Nomad's face showed that he really did not mean it.

When the baron had exhausted his ingenuity, and gained no further information worth the effort, the Indian, still bound, was hoisted to the back of the led animal, which, by the way, was Wild Bill's horse, brought along for emergencies.

Then the task of following the pony tracks was again pushed.

But at the end of an hour it came to an inglorious halt; the tracks were lost utterly on a sheet of lava, which extended over many acres—a sea of black glass pitted with air holes.

At the end of another hour the ponies were located in a rocky glen, where there were grass and water, beyond the lava belt. But as for finding the tracks of the riders, after that, it was not accomplished.

The baron was still fuming when the mid-afternoon camp was made; it hurt his national pride that an Indian should have been found who knew even a few German words.

"Der white man he haf learnt uff vos nodt a Cherman," he declared; "idt vos a white man vot vas a sure American, unt vos drying to gidt a credit for himself py sbeaking dot lie. Ach!"

Even when he had loaded his big pipe, and sought consolation by the nicotine route, he could not stop his audible grumbling.

CHAPTER IX.

CLEVERLY TRAPPED.

That same afternoon, the white-eyed villain known as Sim Hawkins, topping a hill many miles from Tinijas, eyed an Indian sitting in contemplative silence some distance away.

"Waal," he grunted, dropping into the easy vernacular, "luck is swingin' my way; thar's a Snake Toltec sun-baskin' like a lizard, jest when I'm plumb lost."

The Indian figure was wrapped in the familiar black-and-white-striped blankets used by the Snake Toltecs. His face was turned in the other direction.

Fearing that if frightened the Indian would scud out of sight like a scared rabbit, White-eyed Hawkins approached him with unusual care. Then he called softly.

"A sleep or drink," he grumbled, on getting no answer, and he made another advance.

Finally he walked straight up to the blanketed redskin.

"Hello!" he called. "I'm a friend, y' know; got turned about out hyer, an' don't jest know whar I am; so——"

The Indian turned round.

"Huh!" he said.

Hawkins gave an astonishing jump backward, so great was his amazement.

"Buffalo Bill's Piute!" he gasped; "when by rights he ought to be more'n a hundred miles from here!"

He was about to draw his revolver; but a number of dark objects, that he had supposed to be stones half buried in the sand, wriggled and sat up, and he discovered that they were men, with weapons in their hands—the weapons pointing straight at him.

Gurgling his fright, he looked from face to face, and saw before him Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, old Nomad, and Varon von Schnitzenhauser.

The latter first broke the silence.

"Idt iss a bity dot I haf to shoodyt you; budt I am going to do idt, oof you ton'dt kvick holdt oop your handts."

Hawkins' hands went above his head with surprising alacrity.

"Throw your weapons on the ground," Buffalo Bill commanded.

Hawkins took his hands down long enough to comply, unloading a miscellaneous collection of deadly hardware; then shot them above his head again.

"I'm caught," he said; "I'm not fool enough not to know it."

Nomad rolled out of his sandy bed and began to collect the weapons.

"Yer must er been expectin' ter do some fightin'," he remarked grimly, "by ther looks; two undergrown cannon, an' er littler one; wi' two hog-stickers, an' cartridges ernough ter supply er military company."

He raked them together, and put them behind him.

Hawkins had collapsed against a stone, unnerved by what had happened.

"Where are the Chinese and the Indians?" Buffalo Bill questioned.

Hawkins tried to look blank.

"For two days," said the scout, "we've followed a trail, which we took up near Tinijas; and it has led us here, then played out. We've been waiting for some one to come along who could tell us what became of it; you're the first white man we've seen."

"Your bein' hyar is some surprisin', too," said Hawkins, pulling his wits and his courage together by a superhuman effort. "And you laid a trap fer me. Waal, I'm bound to admit it was a good one. I'm wonderin' whar you got the blanket; that's all."

He looked at Little Cayuse's head feather.

"You've killed a red somewheres, I s'pose, an' that accounts fer it."

"Ther red, which we didn't kill, is right off thar," said Nomad. "We'll show him ter yer when et's needed. Ther thing fer yer ter do is ter answer Cody's questions—not ter ask any."

"Our capture of the Indian and other things," remarked Buffalo Bill, "have given us some information, and you are to add to it. We know that a man and a woman were taken as prisoners out of the town of Tinijas and brought over this trail. They were brought in boxes, or Chinese coffins, a mile or more this side of the town; there the boxes were buried, empty. Since uncovering the boxes, we have found a certain 'sign' in the trail, which makes us believe that the man who is a prisoner is Wild Bill. We are merely guessing that the woman is Donna Isabel; she is missing."

White-eyed Hawkins paled; still his nerve did not desert him.

"I don't know a thing about that," he said.

"We think you do, and we think, also, that you will admit it. The Indian we captured says there is an Indian city near here—a city walled with stone, which would indicate that it is Aztec, or Toltec, or else built by a northern branch of the Mayas of Yucatan. Tell us about that," the king of scouts commanded.

Hawkins hesitated.

"What do I git fer this?" he demanded abruptly.

"Better treatment than you could otherwise expect."

"That ain't enough," he asserted.

"No?"

"That don't do me any good. Maybe I might know somethin', if you fellers would let me go."

"We can't know if it is of any value," said Pawnee Bill, "until we hear it."

Hawkins cast him a malignant look; he had not forgotten, and would never forget, that Pawnee Bill had once flung the knife into his shoulder. Some day, he thought, he would avenge that.

"What about that Indian city, first?" Buffalo Bill demanded.

Hawkins turned this over in his mind.

"Waal, I can't find it," he declared.

"You mean you don't want to find it—for us?"

"No; I can't find it for myself. That's straight. I was lookin' fer it when I saw that Snake Aztec blanket, and——"

"Snake Aztec! I guess you know something, and you will tell it."

Buffalo Bill, seated on the stone by which the Piute had squatted, drew out a revolver. Hawkins' face paled again when he saw it.

"You know me, and you know what I am here for. You are one of the opium smugglers, and we came here to get them; we captured you, and then your friends jumped in, and you escaped. But you will not escape this time unless you loosen up with what knowledge you have about the chink smugglers, about this Snake Aztec city, and about our friend Wild Bill."

Though his tones were quiet, they had a certain firmness and ring that made Hawkins quake in his boots.

"I'm willin' to tell what little I know," he said; "but—if I do, you'll let me go?"

"You'll tell what you know, and you are going to tell it to us right now."

The revolver bore full on his breast.

"I never like to threaten a man, Hawkins," said the scout, "but a murdering scoundrel and liar like you doesn't deserve any consideration. Now, speak up."

Hawkins sucked in his breath.

"Waal, I'll tell what I know. After that you'll let me go, Cody?"

"Begin at the beginning."

They ringed him in, and their faces were not kindly; the courage he had plucked together went to pieces suddenly, like a rope of sand.

"I'll tell everything, Cody," he whined; "and I meant to from the first. It happened—the beginnin' of it—back in Tinijas. The chinks captured Wild Bill and stored him away in a room back of the joss; it's a prison room, where they put chinks that aire to git the bowstring."

"After that, when night had come, and she was hustlin' ter go away, I went into Donna Isabel's room at the hotel, and told her she'd got to go along of me. She didn't want to, and made a fuss; but she went. And I tuck her to that room."

"As I said, it was night then. Granger was there, and some o' the others. They had sneaked into the town, but was arrangin' to go out of it ag'in as quick as they could, fer we had word that your crowd was there, lookin' for him."

"Of course," he licked his lips again—they seemed hot and dry—"Granger knowed that no place whar you could git at him easy would be safe, so it was planned that we'd all git out, and hit for the Snake Aztecs; they're our friends. The chinks was to help us, under cover of the funeral."

"So Granger and me, we crawled into a couple of the chink coffin, and they tuck us out to the chink cemetery; not to plant us, but so's we c'd slide out of the town easy."

"Wough!" Nomad gulped. "Then them coffins didn't hold Wild Bill an'——"

"Did y' think it?" said Hawkins. "Wild Bill and the woman was taken out by a back entrance, while the funeral was goin' on, tied, and gagged, and at one of the livery stables they was loaded onto some hosses. It was easy, by stickin' to the back streets. I didn't see it—I was in a chink coffin; but when we was all in the trail, straightenin' out for the long trip, I found it out."

"The coffins was buried by the trail, so's nobody would guess what had been done; I reckon nobody ever would outside of your crowd!"

His comment passed unanswered.

"One of the Snake Aztecs had been hangin' round the town, in a dirty blanket, pertendin' that he was a Mo-have; he was to guide us, which he did. You have got him now, I jedge. Everything went along well enough. But you was after us, of course, as I know now."

His whitish eyes roved from face to face.

"Then—we was tuck into the Snake Aztec city; after the ponies was corralled in a sink hole in the hills somewhere round hyer. We was brought up to a bluff; then a basket was let down, and, two or three at a time, we was h'isted. And that's how we got in."

"There's a door, though; this mornin' I was let out by that door, and was told by Granger to pike out along the trail, and to come back in a hurry if I saw anything. Our Injun guide was already out, lookin' round. I piked; then, not seein' anything, I tried to go back. But thar's where I fell down; I couldn't find the gate ag'in, ner the blamed old wall; couldn't find anything."

"Wough!" Nomad rumbled. "You're lyin'."

"Honest, I ain't," the unhappy wretch protested. "I knowed that when I come to that you wouldn't believe it, but if Cody should shoot me dead, I'd have ter stand to it."

"And you say," said the scout, "that Wild Bill and the woman are now in the Snake Aztec town?"

"They was, anyway; I don't know about now."

"How long ago was that?"

"I was set out by way o' the gate this mornin'; I cal'late they was in the town then."

"How many white men are in the town?"

"Half a dozen er more."

"Iss vun oof dhem a Cherman?" the baron demanded uneasily.

"I'm shore I don't know; wasn't no Dutchman in our crowd."

"I knowed idt; dose Inchun iss a liar."

"I think you've spoken the truth, Hawkins," said the scout, "and you'll not regret it. We'll try to make it easier for you in the end. But you will have to help us. You have seen that wall, and you would know it again. Besides, we have our Snake Aztec prisoner, and we're likely to get some valuable help from him."

The others fired questions at White-eyed Hawkins.

"The town," he said, answering one from Pawnee Bill, "has got laid-up rock walls on one side. On the other side it is natural rock, which was the thing that tumbled me out of the saddle. You can see a dozen natural-rock walls right from this spot, and there's plenty more; but I can't tell if any one of 'em hides the town."

"Wild Bill hedn't been hurt in any way, I reckon?" Nomad asked, his keen eyes flashing.

"No," said Hawkins. "They threatened some, but he would jest laugh at 'em, and it went at that."

"Thet's Wild Bill; a reckleser critter never lived. Et will be plum' healthy, though, fer ther hull b'ilin' ef they don't harm him."

"Unt der vomans, also-o," the baron added.

Buffalo Bill looked at the declining sun.

"We'll not be able to do much this evening," he said. "It is now so late. But we'll begin early in the mornin'."

The baron was still exploring the face of the prisoner.

"Idt iss a kvestion," he said; "aber dhere iss no Cherman py dot Inchun town in, how can an Inchun learn to *sprechen Sie Deutsch*? Dot iss vot make me a buzzlemendt."

But he got no enlightenment.

"There is another point or two on which I think you can give us information," said Buffalo Bill: "Do you know why Wild Bill and Donna Isabel were carried away by Granger's crowd?"

"They had it in for the woman," White-eyed Hawkins confessed, with some bitterness. "Her mother was a Snake Aztec. I think her father was a Spaniard, or mebbe a Mexican. Anyway, her home had once been with that tribe, and for a long time. Of course, you don't know, I reckon, that the Snake Aztecs aire mixed up in that opium smugglin'; but it's so. The opium is brought into the Gulf of Californy by vessels runnin' from China and the Sandwich Islands. It's unloaded at some little ports

along there; then these Snake Aztec runners put it in bundles, on their heads, and bring it inland and up to the Mexican line; generally into their town. From there it is sent out to Tinijas, and to other places, where it is handled by Granger's crowd. So you can see that the Snake Aztecs ain't goin' to like anybody that has throwed 'em down; that's the way Granger figgered it. And he took the woman back to 'em, so that they could settle with her."

"Which means that he expects the Indians to torture her for what she has done."

White-eyed Hawkins squirmed a little at that.

"Mebbe not, Cody; but he thought the old squaws would make it interestin' fer her."

"I didn't think Granger was as bad as that!"

Hawkins tried to soften his statement.

"About Wild Bill now?" the king of scouts demanded.

"Did they expect the Indians to torture him?"

"Waugh!" Nomad growled; it sounded much like the "Woof" of a bear. "Ef they does——"

"No," said Hawkins promptly. "He had a different plan about him. Granger didn't know but mebbe you would folier; he was shore you would if you could strike the trail. And—— Well, he's a bit afeared o' ye, Cody; and that's a fact."

"Et shows his sense," said Nomad. "He'd better be!"

"So," went on Hawkins, "he thought he'd jest take Wild Bill along; and then, if you crowded him, Cody, he'd have somethin' with which to hold you off, y' understand?"

"You might make it plainer."

"He could hold ye off, by threatenin' to kill Wild Bill, and then mebbe save his own hide by releasin' him to me."

"I see!"

"Thar's one thing about Granger," said Hawkins: "he's allus lookin' out fer his own hide."

"Et'll be plum' as full of holes as an old sieve before he gits through this campaign, I'm thinkin'," Nomad threatened. "Ef he thinks he can toy wi' Wild Bill, an' not hev ter pay fer et, his thinkin' machine is geared wrong."

"I can see now that he was a fool," admitted Hawkins, speaking to the king of scouts; "you're goin' to git him, Cody. He ought to know it. I know it now well enough. So——"

He hesitated.

"Well, I'll be fair with ye," he added. "I'll do what I can fer ye now, and if I knowed where that village was, an' that gate, I'd p'int 'em out; I shore would. If I do the fair thing now, you won't forgit it when settlin' day comes; you won't forgit it, Cody?"

His tone had changed to a whining appeal.

"I think we can find the town with the help of our Snake Aztec prisoner," the scout informed him. "But what help you give, if you play fair from this on, will not be counted against you; of that you may be assured."

"I know you're a straight man, Cody," Hawkins whined. "And I'll do what I kin."

He looked up, hearing words from the lips of Pawnee Bill.

"What's that?" he asked.

"I was just quoting an old rhyme," said Pawnee Bill. "It seems appropriate. It runs like this—you may have heard it:

"When the devil was sick,
The devil a priest would be;
When the devil was well,
The devil a priest was he."

CHAPTER X.

IN THE HOME OF THE SNAKE AZTECS.

Fear of the revolvers of Buffalo Bill and his friends induced the Snake Aztec prisoner the next morning to offer to guide the party to his village.

But on discovering that the approach was over a naked lava plain that could not hide a rabbit, Buffalo Bill and his companions halted when they came in sight of the black chert walls, and decided to wait for the first shadows of another night.

Their fears for the safety of Wild Bill and Donna Isabel made this necessary delay peculiarly trying. However, they bore it as philosophically as they could, and spent the day in concealment, making all possible plans and preparations, and securing such further information as they could from the Indian and White-eyed Hawkins.

The additional information was little enough. One noteworthy disclosure was that the gate mentioned by Hawkins was not on that side; instead, there was a crazy ladder, which was nothing more than footholds cut in the precipitous face of the cliff, giving access to the town.

As soon as darkness had fallen, the entire party moved with great caution to the foot of the cliffs. There were still no indications of an Indian town; in fact, there had been no signs of life, animal or human.

Here Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill prepared to make the ascent. The others were to remain in their places with the prisoners; but prepared to render what aid they could, if they discovered that aid was needed.

"Ef yer pistol goes off, er we hears yer whoop," said Nomad, "you'll find me and ther baron, likewise Little Cayuse, swarmin' up to yer some swift."

Having clung to his penitential attitude, Hawkins had informed them that there were at least two hundred Indians in the place, nearly a third of them warriors; the others being women and children, and that they were fanatical beyond belief.

According to Hawkins, the town was a sacred place, and it was considered impregnable. For these reasons, if the invaders were seen and captured, they could expect annihilation.

"I ain't tryin' to skeer ye, Cody," he urged. "I'm simply tryin' now to give ye a fair deal. You got to look out."

It was no easy thing to scale the cliff. Clinging with hands and feet to the small holes provided for the purpose, the king of scouts and his close friend went up slowly.

Drawing themselves carefully over when they had gained the top, they saw, in a cuplike valley, or depression in the hills, a town that seemed half Indian and half Mexican. There was a heterogeneous collection of houses, which appeared to have been pitched down in their places, there was so little semblance of streets. The houses were mere huts and hovels of mud, with the exception of some much larger near the center. These were supposed to be the temple and the houses of the priests, for they had been told the Snake Aztecs had an elaborate religious system. One of the houses, they thought, might be a prison, where Wild Bill and the woman were held, if they still lived.

The fear that the daring borderman and Donna Isabel had lost their lives was not cheering, so it was thrust aside as fast as it presented.

There were lights in the town, but no great illumination. It seemed that some of the lights were from fires in the houses, though a few burned in the narrow passages.

Pawnee Bill turned his head and looked at his friend.

"Well, Pard Bill?" he queried.

"The houses face toward the center of the town," said the scout; "so, it seems to me, our play is to keep in their rear all we can, and advance on the larger buildings as we find opportunity."

"You are right, necarnis," Pawnee Bill tightened his belt. "Now I am ready."

As they slipped down into the midst of the mud houses, they passed close by a guard, whose duty seemed to be to watch the wall on that side. In the rear of the houses the shadows gave them shelter. Here they hastened on as fast as safety permitted, knowing that the moon would rise soon, when their danger would be increased.

Having worked their way by much crawling and short runs to the center of the town, they lay for a time in the shadows of one of the larger buildings, while they discussed their next procedure.

The thump of an Indian drum broke on the silence. As if by magic, Indians swarmed in the cramped passages before the houses, and moved on the largest building. Falling into line, they were led by a medicine man, who piped shrilly on an instrument of reeds. They passed

close by the concealed scouts, who were thus able to determine their number approximately.

"About fifty warriors, I judge," Buffalo Bill whispered.

The Indians, revealed by lights that flared in their ranks, were togged out barbarically, in paint and feathers, with many brass rings on arms and legs. They kept jerky time to the music of the reeds. Now and then yells arose, wild and wolflike.

The big building was evidently a temple. A door opened in it, to receive them, and they passed within. Behind the warriors came a swarm of women and children, their talk a shrill scream. They, too, vanished into the building.

"Now what, Pard Bill?" Pawnee Bill asked.

"We're going inside, if it can be done."

"It seems that it will be difficult, necarnis; but I'm following your lead, you know."

"This way, then."

Buffalo Bill squirmed aside, and, after a short crawl, found an Indian house that had been emptied of its occupants. A stone fireplace in the middle of the room had a fire burning in it, which gave out light enough to see by.

There was but one door, and apparently no window; yet Buffalo Bill boldly invaded the house, trusting to the confusion round the large building to conceal his movements.

Pawnee Bill slid along at his heels as quietly, and came into the house right behind him. If he had not already known what it was Buffalo Bill hoped to accomplish here, he now saw.

The king of scouts took a blanket from a cot by the wall, pitched it to Pawnee Bill, and appropriated another for himself.

"They're of good size, fortunately," he whispered. "Now, if we can find headdresses or feathers."

They found both on the walls.

When they emerged from the Indian house, having borrowed these belongings, they could not have been told from Snake Aztecs a dozen yards away. The blankets were striped in the Snake Aztec fashion, and the headdresses bore feathers of red, blue, and black, like the one captured by Little Cayuse.

Skirting the rear of the big building, they came to a queer embankment. When they had crawled to the top, they saw that it stretched along in the form of a serpent.

"I'm beginning to understand the name of these people," said the scout. "They must be serpent-worshipping Aztecs."

Continuing along the back of the earthen snake, they rounded the farther end of the building, and, by a half circuit, came back toward the entrance in front.

A few Indians were still passing in, hurrying as if they knew they were belated. Within the temple sounded the thumping of the drum, the piping of the reeds, and an occasional howl.

"It's a risky thing, Gordon, that we're undertaking," said the scout, "and nothing may come of it."

"Still, we must see it through, necarnis; we've got to find out where Wild Bill is, you know."

"If we are detected, we'll make a jump for this door," Buffalo Bill advised, "and get out the best way we can."

Stalking in boldly, as if they belonged there, trusting to their blankets and headdresses, the great scout and his friend got inside, and looked about.

The large room was closely packed with Indians; the drum and reeds at the front, near a stone throne, with the warriors close upon it, and nearer the door the women and children. A priest, or medicine man, in a wonderful headdress of horns and feathers, was powwowing away in a tongue that neither of the watching white men understood.

In the midst of this, excited talk and exclamations sounded off at one side.

"Deserted Jericho!" whispered Pawnee Bill. "What has broken loose over there?"

As if in answer, the voice of a woman reached them, drowned in a babble of Indian words—the voice, unmistakably, of Donna Isabel.

"Sneak of Unk-te-hee!" Pawnee Bill gasped. "You recognize that voice, Pard Bill?"

"Donna Isabel."

"Yes; but throwing Indian lingo. I think I'd like to know the meaning of it. From the sounds, I don't think she is having a happy time."

They became quite convinced of this when they heard the heavy voice of Jim Granger breaking in. He was mixing English words with Indian ones, and was making ugly accusations against the woman.

The scouts moved in the direction of the wrangle, and came to a stone passage leading to a door. Behind the door was a room, which held the speakers.

They had no more than done this, when an Indian came up behind them hurriedly. They let him pass, and he went into the room without a second glance at them. He left the door slightly ajar, perhaps without intention, and the words from the room reached them more distinctly.

It became apparent that Granger was accusing Donna Isabel, before an Indian council, of treachery to the Snake Aztecs.

There was a clamor against her when he had spoken; then her voice rose in defense. But they could not tell what she said. But for the explanations which had been received from their Indian captive, they would have been quite in the dark as to what it meant.

The conference became a violent dispute; then it broke up in a quarrel, and, the door flying open, the scouts beat a quick retreat, with the Indians who had been in there streaming along behind them.

From the small room, the quarrel between Granger and his supporters and Donna Isabel was transferred to the larger room. Weapons were drawn, and a battle in the temple seemed imminent.

Ringed round by a few adherents, the woman backed into a corner. She had donned Indian dress, which became her, and she seemed a very princess defying her foes. But they overwhelmed her; the crowd in the temple surged upon her like a tide, until a door back of her gave under the pressure, and friend and foe went rolling out through it.

The temple room was nearly deserted, but it would not be so long, and the scouts got out of it while they had this opportunity.

In the shadow by the temple walls they talked of what they had seen and heard.

"Granger, on bringing her here as his prisoner," said the scout, "expected to have the tribe turn against her, and slay her or torture her; but she has found a few friends, and they're trying to stand by her."

"I think you are right, necarnis," Pawnee Bill agreed; "but the question is, has she got friends enough? It didn't look it. If she hasn't, it will go hard with her. But perhaps we can lend a hand."

They had not located Wild Bill.

CHAPTER XI.

WILD BILL IN PRISON.

Wild Bill Hickok lacked his usual joviality, as he sat in his prison pen and reflected on his condition. He was blaming himself unduly for what happened, when the door of the room opened and Donna Isabel came in.

He was astonished to see her there; behind her, in the passage, visible through the half-open door, stood a number of Indian guards, armed with knives and copper-headed lances.

The door closing on her, she spoke:

"You didn't expect to see me?"

He had arisen, with his usual courtesy.

"I didn't," he said; "for I thought you were as much a prisoner here as I am. Will you take this stool? It's not much of a seat, but it's the best I have to offer."

But she did not sit down.

"I haven't had a pleasant time," she informed him. "You guessed that. Granger thought he could turn the Snake Aztecs against me; he has failed. But I'm not yet safe; he has a lot of friends, and they'll still give me trouble. But now that I'm here, and have triumphed so far, I intend to stand by my guns."

"Good!" he cried. "I admire your pluck."

"I've been considering what I can do for you," she

said. "Of course, you can't stay here—and live; but I confess that right now I don't know how I can get you out of this prison and out of the town."

"If those bloody guards weren't right out there, I'd risk getting out," he said.

"If you passed those guards, you couldn't get out of the town; the streets are full of Indians. Even if you were out of the town, they'd follow you, and run you down in the hills. No; some other plan must be worked out. You will have to give me time for that."

"I don't want you to run risks for me," he urged.

"I told you that we should have to help each other," she reminded, "when we had our talk, as we were being brought here. I feared, then, that Granger would be too strong for me here, and if that had happened, as he planned it, I should have been helpless. I came now only to let you know that for the time, at least, I have defeated him. He denounced me before the council, and wanted to have me tortured; he said I had betrayed the Snake Aztecs, when I had really only betrayed him, if that harsh word can be used to describe what I did. He made some of the Indians believe him, and they are with him, against me; but my mother's brother came to my help. Fortunately, he had influence and many friends. That saved me. Otherwise," she shuddered, "I should be in the torture chamber right now."

"If we can get out together——"

"I shall see that you get out; but, as for myself, I don't know that I want to go."

This was surprising.

"You see," she explained, "my mother's mother was Queen of the Snake Aztecs; my own mother would have been queen after her if she had not fallen in love with a white man, my father, and abandoned the tribe. My older sister became queen then. But now she is dead. Since her death there has been no queen, and the sorcerer, Nekambo, has been ruler."

"That's the big medicine man," said Wild Bill.

"Yes, and my bitter enemy now, for he fears me—he fears that I may become queen, when his power would decrease and fade away. The Snake Aztecs take kindly to a queen, and my mother's brother has been trying to work up a sentiment for me. But just now Nekambo is able to hold his position. But," she added, with a fiery flash of her dark eyes, "I doubt if he will keep it long."

"If he does keep it," said Wild Bill, "you are going to have a lot of trouble, and my name will be—Mud."

Donna Isabel shrugged her shapely shoulders.

"I shall do the best I can. I know that it is now a life-and-death fight; but I think I shall win. Until I do——"

"I am to stay here. That is what you mean."

"Yes."

"I'd like to take part in the mêlée; inactivity, in a prison pen, never appealed to me. It's not the proper rôle for Wild Bill. I might crack a few heads, if you'd arrange it so that I could get into the next fight, which I can see you think is right ahead of you. Don't you think you had better give me the chance?"

There was a wild clamor beyond the door, and the dancing legs of the warriors there indicated some fresh excitement.

"I can't talk longer," said Donna Isabel, backing to the door. "Remember that I'll help you—if I live."

She threw the last at him, and jumped out into the stone corridor.

Wild Bill would have followed, in spite of her desire that he should not, if the door had not banged in his face.

He heard a heavy bolt click, as he threw himself against the door. Then he heard a wild outcry. He hammered at the door wrathfully.

But the confused sounds and yells faded out of the corridor, and he was left in the prison to nurse his disappointment.

CHAPTER XII.

DARING PARDS.

Donna Isabel knew that she had the faith of her life before her when the door of the prison rattled, and she saw, close by her in the corridor, her uncle, Itlac, with a

number of warriors forming his bodyguard, and beyond them a mass of unfriendly Indians, yelling and brandishing their weapons.

Itlac spoke sharply to her.

"You would bring death to all of us," he said. "Have you no sense, that you talk with the white stranger, in this time of trouble?"

He thrust a slender spear into her hands.

"Take it, for we shall have to fight," he said, "and follow me!"

He lifted his spear and shield, the latter of horsehide stretched over a circular frame of wood, and, at the head of his men, charged boldly on the yelling mass at the end of the corridor.

Donna Isabel ran close behind him. For the moment she was as much Indian as any warrior there. Her white training fell away, leaving the savage heart of this wild beauty bare. She shrieked in unison with the warriors of her mother's brother, and when a brave stretched out an arm to stay her, she spitted him with the spear.

Nekambo's men, composed of the ignorant rabble, fell back before the onslaught of the better-trained braves, and Itlac's force gained the door of the temple.

Making a stand with their backs against the stone door, Itlac's men met here a second onslaught, which they repulsed, and, with a countercharge, swept the adherents of the medicine man out of the building.

When it was over, Itlac stood, panting, beside the wild-eyed young half-breed, his face clotted with gore from a wound on his crown, while round him gathered the warriors who were trying to uphold his show of authority against the old priest.

Donna Isabel looked up at him as he towered beside her, her eyes showing admiration. Her veins were on fire; she was an Indian of the Indians, at that moment, ready to yield obedience to this man, or even worship him.

Suddenly, as her pulses leaped, she laughed harshly.

"Is it a time for laughter?" he demanded, with a frown.

"Is it not rather a time for prayers to the god of the Snake Aztecs? Or did you laugh because you think the victory is won?"

She had laughed bitterly because of a memory of herself in the dancing hall of the Casino. She had been white then, in her sympathies and viewpoint, so that the applause she had always received had seemed sweet. Now it looked pitiful, childish, unworthy. For was she not, by right of birth, Queen of the Snake Aztecs? Round her were fighting warriors; not the thin-blooded, white-livered crowd of perspiring white men, whose applause she now scorned.

Glancing at her, as she drew herself proudly erect beside him, Itlac had an inspiration. She was Queen of the Snake Aztecs—a point for which he was fighting; but she did not look it, except for the striped blanket cast round her slender figure.

"It will not do," he said, speaking his thought aloud. "A queen should be clothed as a queen. They are in there—the clothing your sister wore; put them on."

She hesitated.

"What?" he cried. "You will not play the queen? Then——"

But she had turned and fled for the room.

She found the garments in a moth-eaten chest, and, drawing them out, she arrayed herself hurriedly in them.

When she appeared again in the midst of the panting and excited warriors, she was regal, from the Indian standpoint. Their eyes kindled at sight of her, and their yells arose.

But there were answering yells, beyond the door of the sanctuary; the braves of the medicine man were massing there again for a charge on Itlac's party.

Donna Isabel's fiery Indian uncle did not wait for the attack to materialize; he gave back yell for yell, then led his warriors in a rush for the door.

Through it they rolled, stabbing with lances and knives, yelling and screaming like so many fanatical devils.

Donna Isabel started to follow them, then thought better of it. But she stepped close up to the door and listened to the clamor outside. Beginning to fear that all was lost, her hopes were revived by a sudden change in

the character of the yelling. Itlac came stumbling back into the room; a number of his braves at his heels.

"They have fled," he said; "praise to the god of the Snake Aztecs!"

But even he could not understand it; all he knew was that, at a moment when he began to feel that the fight was going against him, the opposing force strangely lost its courage, and fell away in a jangling and quarreling rabble, then broke in wild retreat.

"The victory is ours," he said. "The god of the Snake Aztecs fought for us and with us."

"Perhaps the priest is dead," she said.

Whether Nekambo was dead or living could not at once be determined. But since she had assumed the position of Queen of the Snake Aztecs by donning the queenly garments, the importance of performing the duties of the part was not to be questioned.

Pressing this duty upon her, Itlac brought into the room an ebonylike box. Having cleared out the warriors, he swung a kettle over a tripod, built a quick fire, filled the kettle with water, and sprinkled it with an odorous liquid, then departed, following the warriors.

Donna Isabel waited until he had gone, then took up her task. She was priestess, as well as queen, and she knew her rôle. More, she believed in it. So that, as she set about her task, her manner became as solemn and grave as if she were conducting a funeral.

While the fire burned fiercely, and the water in the kettle began to bubble and send forth clouds of steam, she opened the black box brought in by Itlac. It held a dozen small snakes, rolled together in a knot. Disentangling them, she took them out one by one, caressing them and crooning to them.

If one proved unresponsive and angry, she struck it on the head with a small black reed, like a bamboo, threw it harshly back into the box, and showered it with the liquid which Itlac had brought in the bottle. The odor, or the liquid, had a numbing effect apparently, for after that the reptile seemed submissive enough.

Finally, dropping the snakes into the box close by the fire, she turned to the contents of the kettle. She threw in leaves and herbs, and stirred the mess round and round. While doing this she wailed out an Indian chant.

How long she engaged in this she did not know; the ceremony had a hypnotizing effect, so that she lost knowledge of the passage of time; but she was aroused by a word in English.

Looking up, she was amazed to see standing before her two well-known figures—Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill.

It was a shock; she had believed they were in Tinijas or far away; that they could be in the town of the Snake Aztecs, and within that sanctuary, seemed unbelievable. She stared at them stupidly, until she remembered that this was profanation—white men were not admitted to that sacred place.

It aroused her to wrath.

Plucking a serpent from the fire—for that is what she seemed to do—she hurled it at them.

"Back!" she cried. "How dare you invade the mysteries?"

Buffalo Bill sprang aside, and the serpent, missing him, fell on the floor, where it coiled like a flash and struck at his boots. He kicked it unceremoniously against the wall.

"How dare you?" she gasped, her features convulsed. "How dare you?"

"What nonsense is this?" he demanded, for he was not pleased. "We came here, at the risk of our lives, to help you, Donna Isabel."

"But—but—you are in the temple; the sacred temple. It is pollution. Besides," she gasped, "how did you get here—how did you get in?"

"One question at a time," said the king of scouts. "You see that we are here, and that means, of course, that we got in. If you will be sensible, and get down that snake"—she had caught up another—"we will talk."

She thrust the squirming thing into the black box; then, rather than sit down, on the stone behind her, she stood at the white men.

"It will take but a few words, Donna Isabel," he said, "to tell all there is to tell. We followed the trail of the Chinese and white men from Tinijas, because we were sure that you and Wild Bill had been carried away by them. An hour ago, after reaching the base of the obsidian bluffs, we climbed into the town, my pard and I; then we worked our way toward the largest buildings. There has been a lot of fighting among the Indians—in this big building and outside."

She nodded.

"Yes; I know. I have taken part in it."

"We mixed with the Indians, and——"

"And you were not discovered?"

"We took care to guard against that, you see; we secured blankets and headdresses out of one of the houses, and wore them; and so, in the excitement, we missed discovery."

"As I was going to say, we were close by that door when the fighting began, a while ago, and we captured the big medicine man."

"What?" she cried, starting up.

"We think he is the chief medicine man; he was the leader of the party that was trying to get in. He turned, to avoid the charge made by the Indians who swarmed out, and as he did so he tripped over my foot—I had stuck it out in front of him; and when he fell I sat down on his head."

"You—you—what——"

She could not articulate clearly, so great was her amazement.

"The other Indians," the scout went on, "did not see their leader fall, and did not know what had become of him, though he was squirming under me like a lizard, and that started a panic. They broke apart and ran, yelling, with those that had rushed out on them in hot pursuit."

"Then we got in here—by the door, which had been left open and forgotten. We dragged old What's-his-name in with us and closed the door, for we expected the Indians to get their wits in a little while and swarm back. The old fellow is back there now, with our blankets and head feathers, tied and gagged."

"Old Nekambo?"

"Well, we don't know what his name is."

"It is impossible!" she gasped.

"We heard you crooning away over here—though we didn't know it was you—and when we came on to investigate——"

"And committed sacrilege!"

"When we committed sacrilege," he amended, "you threw the snake at us. Apparently you had been boiling it in that kettle, yet it was alive."

It seemed to her that he laughed.

She was a crumpled heap of bewilderment as the king of scouts finished.

CHAPTER XIII.

BUFFALO BILL'S WITCHCRAFT.

The old medicine man lay in a heap close by the stone door, and beside him were the blankets and headdresses cast aside by the scouts when they discovered that the crooning woman was Donna Isabel, the half-breed dancing girl of the Tinijas Casino.

The girl would not believe until she had seen him there with her own eyes and had heard again the story of his capture. Even then she was terrified, as his lateral glance fell on her. In spite of her white blood, she had strong Indian superstition.

"If this is discovered!" she cried.

"We can guess that if it is there will be some angry Indians," the scout admitted. "But his capture helped your friends, and we expected that it would help us when we made it. We still hope so. We intend to hold him for our own protection and as a hostage for Wild Bill."

"He is near," she said.

"Good!" Pawnee Bill cried. "Just show us where he is, then we are ready to get our way out."

They were interrupted by Indian voices outside; a clamor was rising again, showing, as they thought, that

some of the medicine man's followers were regaining their courage.

"I don't think we have any time to lose, Donna Isabel," said the king of scouts. "If you will pilot us to the place where Wild Bill is held, we'll try to get at him."

She held up her hand.

"Listen! It is Itlac, calling to me."

"Who is he?" asked Pawnee Bill.

"My uncle—my mother's brother; the one man in this place who can save us. I was engaged in the Snake Aztec mysteries, at his command, when you interrupted; I must go on with them."

Fighting began again out by the door.

"It's our time, necarnis, while they're at that," Pawnee Bill urged. He turned to the girl. "Just show us where our friend Wild Bill is, please; we haven't time to wait."

"You must wait," she said, and ran from the room.

When they tried to follow her, the door through which she had vanished held them back.

The fighting still continued outside. Anxious to get out, they went round the room, looking for a door they could force; but the doors were of stone, solidly fastened.

While they were engaged in this fruitless search, the girl reappeared, springing into the room without warning. She bore a robe.

"Nekambo's men are gaining," she said, panting the words. "They say he is in here, a prisoner, and they are coming in to find him; my uncle is down, wounded, and the fight goes against him. I fear it is because you invaded the temple; the snake god avenges such things."

"Your white blood and education ought to tell you," said Buffalo Bill, "that is foolishness. But what is the purpose of the robe?"

"I have thought of something. Over there is Nekambo, bound and helpless, but as soon as his friends are in here, they will find and release him. He must be taken to another place. Then—then—you are to play Nekambo."

The scout was astounded, so daring was the suggestion.

"I think you can," the girl urged. "You are wonderfully wise; you have done many things more difficult. And I will help. You can wear his headdress and robes, and, over all, this sacred robe, which he wears only when engaged in the mysteries. I will crouch behind the fire, with a blanket over me, so that I will not be seen. And I will speak—I will speak for Nekambo. It is the only thing that can save us now. Quick; the stone door will be forced soon."

Furious blows were being rained on it.

Under her directions, Buffalo Bill and his pard worked now like beavers. They dragged the bound medicine man into a small room which she showed them, and left him there, with the door locked on him. Close by the door, as an additional precaution, Pawnee Bill took his station. He was armed with a lance, also with his revolvers, and the filched Indian blanket and headdress covered him. His face was smeared with paint.

Though serious work, what followed was like comedy.

When the stone door yielded and swung round, and the followers of the medicine man leaped in, they beheld Nekambo, as they thought, stooped above the sacred fire. The sight stopped them. The pretended medicine man passed his hands through the steam from the kettle; then he began apparently to pluck serpents out of the fire. One by one he tossed them aloft, caught them, and threw them down. The thick steam aided the deception; from the door it seemed to the watchers that he threw them into the kettle.

From a bottle he poured over his hands a liquid, which burst into flame, and his flaming hands, swinging through the air, waved the Indians into silence.

It was cheap trickery, but it held them spellbound.

Then apparently the medicine man spoke. The voice came from the girl, under the blanket behind the fire; but she gave it a hoarse croak, and the Indians thought the man was speaking.

"The snake god caught me out of the midst of the fighting," said the voice, "and brought me into this place, where I was shown that what I did was wrong. It is useless to fight against the will of the snake god. His

will is that the girl you have seen shall be Queen of the Snake Aztecs, her word a law unto you; it is her right by inheritance. I shall contend against her no longer, and it is my wish that you shall not do so. I have sinned, and for that I am going into retirement a while. Now leave me."

The harmless liquid, a phosphorus compound, did its duty again; the flaming hands of the scout, dyed to an Indian red, waved the Indians out of the temple.

In bewilderment, they retreated beyond the broken door. The disguised scout frightened them still further by following them; then he closed the door as well as he could, and swung a blanket across it.

"Now show us where Wild Bill is!" he commanded.

CHAPTER XIV.

WILD BILL AND THE QUEEN.

His prison door opening quietly, Wild Bill saw before him Donna Isabel in her queenly robes, her dark cheeks aflame. As he started up, she turned with a quick motion and locked the door.

"It is for your safety," she explained. "If I failed to fasten the door, you would throw yourself out there, and be killed."

Wild Bill's eyes snapped.

"I could take away that key, and let myself out," he said.

"But you won't; you are a gentleman, and would not attack me when I am risking everything to protect and help you."

"That's right," he said. "You're safe enough. There has been a lot of wild-cat fighting. Tell me about it. And give me some hope, can't you? that I'm to get out of this pen before long! I suppose it means something—that dress you're wearing?"

He pushed out for her the stool he had been occupying, and sat down on the tiny cot of skins that lay against the wall as she took a seat.

"Tell me all about it," he urged.

"If you could get out," she said, not replying to his question, "you would go away at once?"

"It wouldn't take me long to shake the dust of this hamlet," he confessed.

"And you would leave me here?" she protested.

"No, of course not; we're in the same boat. You're as much a prisoner as I am, in certain respects. We'd try to get out together."

"But if I remained?"

"You wouldn't—you wouldn't want to. Why should you think of that? You were brought here by Granger, and you're in the midst of enemies—though you've got friends, too, of course."

She searched his face with her shining eyes, and the flame in her cheeks deepened.

"I think," she said, "that I shall want to stay, even if I can go away; the medicine man is out of the way for a time, and I have become—what do you think?"

"I shall think you have become crazy if you choose to stay," he asserted bluntly.

"Queen—Queen of the Snake Aztecs!" she cried. "That is what I have become!"

"Then your side has won? It's what your Indian garb means; I ought to have guessed it."

"It is going to win; there can be no doubt of it, I think, since Nekambo is out of the way, and since—"

She was about to speak of Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill, but she stopped.

"Suppose," he said, "that your side wins, and that you stay here; suppose that you are queen of this village? What does it amount to? You are a white woman—in your training; and this is no life for you."

"It might be," she said. "It could be made very happy."

"How?"

"You are stupid, and I did not think it." The flame in her cheeks was now that of anger. "But perhaps you think of me as you do because I am half Indian!"

She threw the lock and stepped into the corridor, and though he might, by a rush, have snatched away the key, there were warriors out in the corridor; and he was trusting that she knew what was best for him at the time.

A flash of understanding came to Wild Bill as he stared at the door after her angry departure.

"Heavens!" he said. "Did she mean that, I wonder?" He got up and walked uneasily round the limited space. "I believe that is just what she meant, and because I didn't see it, she called me stupid. Ha! What would Buffalo Bill think of that?"

He sat down again, a smile curling his lips.

"Ha! Husband of the Indian queen! That would be a rôle for you, Wild Bill! She is queen here, and she wants to stay here; she is half Indian, and she thinks she will like it to rule over these fanatical and cruel redskins. And she thinks I ought to like it—to play king consort. By gorry, this is a new situation—a queen pitching herself at my head, and inviting me to share the royal throne. Wild Bill, you ought to feel flattered."

He laughed softly.

There was a rumble of talk in the corridor. Once he thought he heard the voice of a white man, and concluded it was the voice of Jim Granger.

Then Donna Isabel reappeared, coming in as softly and quickly as before.

"If I promise you protection with the Indians out there," she questioned, "will you promise me that you will not leave this town until I consent?"

He gave her a sharp look.

"Is there any hidden meaning back of that?" he asked.

"You distrust me?"

"Certainly not; but I wondered if the words covered more than I got hold of."

He noted that her dark cheeks were still flushed; also, he could not fail to observe that she was an uncommonly attractive woman in that barbaric robe.

"Do I have your promise?" she queried. "I am thinking of your welfare, you know. It isn't time yet for you to try to leave the town."

"Ah, all right," he said lightly. "Show me where your warriors are, and I make the promise. I want to get out of this hole; it's enough to kill a man to stay in here long."

She drew the door open behind her.

"You have given your word," she said. "Now I will take you to the warriors."

He followed her into the corridor, light of foot. It seemed the first step toward his release. The warriors fell away before them as she led on. Foremost in their midst was Itlac, her mother's brother, now the chief man in the village. His profusion of eagle feathers gave notice of that fact.

But when Wild Bill had gained the end of the corridor, and saw into the room beyond, he stopped short, sharp surprise and bewilderment, as well as delight, depicted in his face.

For there stood Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill. They were unharmed, in the midst of Itlac's warriors, whose attitude was friendly.

"By gorry, pards," Wild Bill began, almost too puzzled by words, "this is the neatest surprise of the season! You seem to be masters of the situation here, and I thought you a hundred miles away."

They swarmed upon him, exclaiming their delight, while Itlac's Indians stood by with stolid demeanor. Itlac glanced at the new queen; then came forward, producing a pair of revolvers and a belt filled with cartridges. Wild Bill recognized them as his own. He had been deprived of them in Tinijas. He clutched them with joy. The pistol king, his favorite weapon in his hand, feared no man.

"You will not forget your promise," said Donna Isabel.

Wild Bill flushed; then, without a word, he strapped the cartridge belt round his supple waist.

"You will need your pistols," Buffalo Bill informed him, in the midst of the explanations that began to fly back and forth. "We have achieved a temporary victory. The girl has been announced as the queen, but she has not been accepted as such by all the people, and there is likely to be more fighting. But luckily we've got the leader of the other side out of the way for a time."

"Explain, Pard Cody," said Wild Bill. "My head is buzzing round like a top. I've heard your words, but I

don't understand. It has been too much of a jolt for me to see you and Pawnee Bill in here."

There was a running fire of explanations, mixed with questions and exclamations, at the end of which Wild Bill had a better grasp of the situation.

"I want to lay my hands on Granger," Buffalo Bill announced. "He's the leader of the other side now, since the medicine man dropped out of sight. But if we can't, we'll try to get out of here, now that you are with us and the girl is safe."

Wild Bill seemed confused.

"By gorry," he said. "I'd like to jump right out of here, but, you see, I gave Donna Isabel a promise; when she let me out of that prison pen, I told her that I wouldn't try to get away from the town without her consent. And"—he laughed—"I'm fool enough to be afraid now that she won't be in a hurry to consent. That seems silly to you, of course, but I'll explain it some time, if I can."

"I guess the time for talking has passed, and the time for fighting has come," declared Buffalo Bill, turning toward the outer door of the temple. "Listen to that!"

Wild yells had arisen out there. Mingled with them was the voice of Jim Granger, as if in command.

But Buffalo Bill and his pards were not slow in discovering that some of the yells came from the iron throats of old Nomad, the baron, and Little Cayuse.

CHAPTER XV.

FRIENDS IN PERIL.

Old Nick Nomad and his companions, condemned to wait outside the walls of the town while Buffalo Bill and Pawnee Bill entered it, suffered much mental discomfort.

They heard the sounds of fighting and the clamorous yells, yet they listened in vain for any sound from their daring pards.

"Still, wi' them continuoal fireworks pervadin' the air, I ain't no ways restin' easy," Nomad confided to the baron. "Buffler an' Pawnee Bill mebbe hev got knocked on ther head, an' then they couldn't tip us no word ter come into the rescopin' bizness. I've half a mind ter swarm up thet wall an' take a look, anyhow."

"I vouldt go you," grunted the baron, sucking some degree of satisfaction out of his pipe. "I vouldt go you, oof I t'oughtd I could gedt me a skvint adt anodder Cherman Inchun. Dot iss a pitzness vot haf me buzzled yidt!"

"Waal, thet don't worry me none," Nomad retorted. "Ef an Injun has got sense ernough ter l'arn English, I reckon he'd have sense ernough ter l'arn Dutch, give him a teacher. Dutch ain't much of a language, anyhow, so anybody'd orter be able ter pick et up easy."

"Ach! You insolt me. Cherman—I am nodd sbeaking apoudt low Deutsch—iss der lankvitch oof der indellectualidy; oof a man haf nodd indellectualidy he iss nodd able to learn idt; so idt iss nodd like English, vot any vool can learn; idt iss—"

"Waal, I ain't carin' what it is, baron. Ther question troublin' me is: shall we swarm up this wall an' see what's doin'?"

"Der brisoners!" the baron objected.

"Hang the prisoners! It's what I'd like to do, too, ef I had rope ernough ter spare. But they're tied snug, an' I allow they'll stay hyer." He turned to the Piute. "What does yer make o' thet yellin', Little Cayuse?"

"Injun heap mad," said the Piute.

"Yes, I reckon; they're fightin' mad. I allow, baron, I got ter take a peek, no matter. Go along with me, er stay behind."

But when the old trapper began to climb the wall, he found he had company; both the baron and Little Cayuse were climbing right at his heels.

On reaching the top of the wall, they drew themselves over, and saw, as their friends had done some time before, the village of mud huts lying in the depression below them. The rising moon gave them a good view of the town.

"Ther row seems ter be centerin' round them big houses down in ther middle, baron," Nomad whispered.

"Ve ain'dt seein' so much more here as ve vos a while

ago," grumbled Schnitzenhauser. "I am pedtting dot Puffalo Pill unt Pawnee Pill haf been gabtured dose Inchuns py, also-o. Couldt I haf a schmoke here—I subhose so? I am so tired idt vouldt resdt me. Yimminy, dot vos some climbings!"

"Smoke, an' be hanged to ye; maybe it'll help ye to keep yer mouth shet! What does yer make out, Little Cayuse, is goin' on down thar?"

Instead of answering, the Indian youth began to crawl down the slope in the direction of the houses.

"Ther way ter find out is ter investigate—heh? Waal, yer right, I guess; so I'm follerin' ye. Come along, baron—ef ye can keep still."

The baron groaned, stuck his lighted match in the sand, to put it out, and followed his companions.

They were halfway to the temple before anything happened to trouble them. Then a dog rushed out of a mud hut and flew at the Piute.

Little Cayuse, who was crawling along like a lizard, rolled to one side; his knife glimmered, and the dog, dropping over with a yelp, began to kick and thrash about.

"Sarved him right, an' 'twas the on'y thing ye could do," said Nomad; "but et means we've got ter move on in a hurry."

They had not gone on twenty yards when an Indian discovered the dead dog and raised an outcry. Before they had covered another twenty yards, there was a dozen Indians round the dog, and a terrible hubbub was rising.

Nomad rose to his feet and drew his knife. Little Cayuse also started up.

"Come er-climbin', baron," Nomad ordered. "Them reds aire movin' this way, an' we've got ter run fer et. Maybe we can play hide and seek with 'em in ther shadders o' thet biggest house; anyway, we'll hev ter make er try."

The baron climbed to his feet, and the trio set off at a rapid gait, taking little pains now to conceal their movements. Behind them rose a long howl of anger, and soon pattering feet informed them that they were being pursued.

Throwing back his head as he ran, old Nomad gave utterance to his war howl, knowing that if Buffalo Bill heard it he could not fail to recognize it; yet it seemed a reckless thing to do.

Having gained the nearest walls of the temple, Little Cayuse and Nomad ran on round them, and soon struck the serpent mound, up which they scrambled. The baron followed hard at their heels.

"Er-waugh!" Nomad howled again.

He pitched down the opposite slope of the mound, into the thick shadows, and ran on, between the serpent mound and the wall of the temple, his companions sprinting with equal speed.

Over the mound, and in sharp pursuit, came the aroused Redskins who had seen the slain dog.

Nomad yelped again, rolling out the peculiar note like the "woof" of a dog. Then he received an answer. It was the wolf howl of Buffalo Bill, which, in times of danger, he had heard on so many mountain slopes, and it came from a point ahead of him.

"Waugh! Buffler!" the old trapper screeched. "Halleluyer!"

"Idt iss Cody!" panted the baron.

"Pa-e-has-ka," said Little Cayuse.

How that wolf howl roused them.

"Glee-cry; yer, et's him. Hyer, in ther midst er the heather, too, which I plumb expected, ef he warn't dead."

He became aware that Indians had appeared round the end of the temple he was approaching; he saw them swing out there, in the moonlight. Shifting his knife to his left hand, he drew one of his big revolvers.

Then he stopped.

"Pods ter the left of us, reds ter the right of us;

Pods right in front o' us; like in behind us!

And me by them Redskins, because they've got sight of us. Aire thinkin' fer sure, that they're goin' ter wind us!"

"Glee-cry! That's poetry, an' I didn't know I could make et. How about aire them red niggers back thar, baron?"

"They ar-re coming."

"Pooty fast, eh?"

He lifted his war cry again, and moved on.

But he stopped when he came near the Indians at the end of the big building, for, though Buffalo Bill's cry had sounded there, he was too wary an old fox to run head-long into the midst of enemies.

Then he heard Pawnee Bill:

"Come on, old Diamond; friends are here!"

"Halleluyer!" Nomad yelled.

"Ach, idt iss a bleasantness to hear dot voice," the baron panted.

Without more ado they sprinted ahead, and in another minute were in the midst of the Indians, and saw their friends—Buffalo Bill, Pawnee Bill, and Wild Bill.

"Der dhree Pills!" cried the baron.

"Correct, baron," Wild Bill flung at him. "Too many pills for those reds out there to swallow."

"Thar's about er million more comin' behint us," said Nomad. "But—shake, ole pard. We come er-huntin' fer yer, an' we've found yer. Ye cain't git lost frum Buffler. Is et fight now, er run some more?"

The warriors who were with the three Bills were Itlac's; their present feeling one of friendliness, through the influence of Donna Isabel. But enemies were in front, under command of a young chief, a friend of the medicine man, and with them were Granger and the white men and Chinamen who acknowledged his leadership. In addition, the Indians who had pursued the baron and his companions were coming up rapidly, howling like wolves, and had to be reckoned with.

These two companies of foes placed Itlac's men and our friends between fires; it seemed, therefore, the part of wisdom to make a quick retreat into the temple. Its door was but a few yards off, and Buffalo Bill led the way.

"We'll talk, when we get inside," he said. "Come along, everybody!"

When the temple threshold had been passed, Donna Isabel was to be seen, in her Indian robes, hovering over the sacred fire. She looked up and frowned; she was so much of an Indian in her feelings that she disliked the intrusion of the white men.

But when she saw Itlac's warriors, and Itlac himself following, her manner changed.

"I suppose it is necessary," she said to the king of scouts; "yet I have been afraid—very much afraid—since you tampered with the mysteries and played witchcraft."

"What nonsense!" he said.

With the help of his friends, he was closing and barring the broken stone door; against it arrows were already rattling futilely.

"Religion is never nonsense," she opposed.

"Well, if you feel that way," he said more mildly, "we will not discuss it. We are safe in here—for the time."

"But how we're to git out is stumpin' me," Nomad declared.

"The thing that is stamping me is why you are here," said the scout.

The trapper scratched his grizzled head, considering this a rebuke.

"Waal, yer sec, Buffler," he explained, "we jest couldn't remain out thar, not knowin' what was happenin'; thar war so much wolf howlin' an' band music an' shootin' up of things thet we plumb bergun ter believe you had gone under, so we was obleeged ter come. Then Little Cayuse, thar, he must go an' run his knife inter a pesky Injun dog thet charged him, and we had ter kite. Waugh! I reckon our topknots would soon be dryin' in one o' these hyar mud houses ef you had been reely snuffed out. Ye see, I'm apologizin' dutiful an' prompt, an' I hope ye won't hold et agin' us."

The scout laughed.

"You're all right, old Diamond," Pawnee Bill told the old trapper.

"Budt der kvestion dot iss dtroupling me," said the baron, "iss: Haf you seen anodder Cherman Inchun?"

When the door had been secured, Buffalo Bill saw that

Donna Isabel had returned to the fire, and was feeding it so industriously that the cloud of steam from the hissing kettle almost concealed her.

CHAPTER XVI.

UNEXPECTED RELIEF.

It was not to be expected that Nekambo's friends and Granger's men would not try to dislodge Buffalo Bill's party from the temple. What they considered its desecration roused the Indians outside to a state of fury, so that they did not hesitate to ram the door with beams of wood, in spite of the danger.

When it fell at length, Granger was seen leading the force there; but he paid for his desperation, for he dropped under the revolver fire which drove the Indians back.

The door was made fast again, and for a long time there was no further disturbance. Then a number of Indians, gaining the roof, tore away slabs of stone and beams of wood, and rained down a shower of sticks and stones.

But it was easy to avoid this by standing close against the walls. And so long as no harm was done, Buffalo Bill would not permit any one to fire at the Snake Aztecs on the roof.

For an hour or more, while this continued intermittently, the white men in the temple considered ways and means, looking to an escape from the temple and the town.

Near the end of this period they heard a dull sound somewhere, like the fall of a stone or of a heavy body, but as similar sounds had been heard frequently, they gave this no attention.

But when Donna Isabel, who now and then flitted out of the room nervously, only to return in the same manner, announced that Nekambo was gone from his close-at-hand prison, and they discovered that he had climbed to a high window slit and had wriggled through it, they thought they understood; he had, they believed, leaped down from the window to the ground outside.

This apparently put even a more serious face on the situation. Donna Isabel was thrown into a panic of fear by the discovery, and even stolid Itlac manifested great uneasiness.

"You see," the girl wailed to Buffalo Bill, "they will learn now that the mystery witchcraft which they thought was his was not his—that you were wearing his robes while he lay tied up out there, and that will enrage them beyond measure. I had a feeling all the while that it was wrong to do it; that the Aztec snake god would punish us for it. And now you see what has happened."

"They will find getting in here quite as hard a job with Nekambo as without him," said the king of scouts, who was not easily frightened.

Still, he wished it had not happened—regretted the escape of the old medicine man. It would make their own contemplated escape from the temple and the town doubly difficult apparently.

To their astonishment, however, no assault on the stone door followed. For some time the Indians outside had been comparatively quiet, and this condition continued.

It was broken at the end of half an hour by an unearthly wailing.

The girl started up from the fire when she heard it.

"Some one is dead!" she said impressively.

"Waugh!" Nomad gurgled. "Granger is dead—I seen him fall, and I reckon thar aire others."

"But some one of importance," she added. "Some Indian of importance."

"Thet young chief thet was leadin' may hev got et; 'twouldn't s'prise me. He war right in ther front, wi' Granger, an' jest as reckless. Et's Injun nature ter kick up a hullabaloo when a chief falls."

She nodded an affirmative.

"I think you must be right; the young chief was killed in that last charge on the door."

"Sarved him right, ef he was," Nomad grumbled. "We ain't askin' nothin' but ter be let out o' hyar with our

friends; we ain't pinin' to hurt nobody ef we ain't pushed. 'Twar they're fault thet Wild Bill was brought hyar."

The wailing continued.

At the end of another half hour some one hammered on the stone door of the temple.

"Shall we open it?" Pawnee Bill asked, when the hammering continued.

Itlac seemed inclined to do so; he was anxious to get out and learn what the wailing indicated.

"Et's mebbeso er trick," Nomad objected. "Yer cain't trust Injuns. Thar ain't no believin' how treacherous they kin be sometimes. I ricklict onct, thet one called ter me in a bunch er bresh, sayin' that he was sick an' dyin', an' wouldn't I come an' git him some warter. When I went, like a fool, he had a dozen with him, and they jumped me. I'm kerryin' scars yit frum their fight I made, an' ef Buffler hedn't come ter my rescoo, ther critters would er roasted me over a slow fire; they war preparin' to do et when Buffler cut in on 'em an' sp'iled their fun."

When the tapping on the stone door went on, Itlac, as well as Buffalo Bill, suggested that Donna Isabel should speak to the Indian there.

She stepped close up to the door.

"We hear you," she said, addressing him in his own tongue, which she used as readily as English. "We will listen to what you have to say. But we are prepared for treachery."

There was a tremendous stir among Itlac's warriors when the answer came.

She whirled in flaming excitement and translated it:

"Nekambo is dead!"

Itlac jumped to the door, and began a furious conversation with the Indian outside. Then he turned and addressed his warriors.

Again Donna Isabel translated for the benefit of the white men.

"He was found dead at the foot of the wall out there. They do not understand it," she added, "but I think when he jumped down from that high window the fall killed him. They think he was killed by the snake god; he was supposed by them to have all power, yet he permitted the desecration of the temple, and they say that the anger of the snake god was shown against him by the fact that when he last celebrated the mysteries here his voice was changed, so that it croaked like the voice of a lizard, and now the snake god has destroyed him."

Itlac was still chattering with the Indian outside, while some of his men moved to the stone door to open it.

"Granger is dead, they say," she continued, "and Nekambo is dead; so they are willing to accept me as Queen of the Snake Aztecs!" Her voice rose in her excitement. "But they demand that the white men shall be expelled from the temple, which they are desecrating by their presence."

"'Twould be hard," Nomad grumbled under his breath, "ter desecrate a hole like this, I reckon; but Injuns aire—waal, they're Injuns; only some aire more foolish than others; these hyer aire ther wust."

"That bodes us no good?" Buffalo Bill asked her. "They will jump on us as soon as we are out of this place?"

She took Itlac's position, and fired questions at the spokesman outside.

"No," she said, turning to the king of scouts, "they declare that if you are willing to go out peacefully, they will not trouble you."

"I wouldn't trust reds like them, not 'z fur as I could sling a steer by ther tail," Nomad growled. "Yer cain't b'lieve 'em, Buffler."

But Buffalo Bill thought otherwise, and he was backed in his belief by Hickok and Pawnee Bill.

Itlac's warriors were straining at the door to slide it open, and the white men did not try to interfere.

When the stone door had been swung aside, a large body of Snake Aztecs were seen before it, and though they were armed, their manner was anxious, rather than warlike.

With their weapons ready for instant use, the white men passed outside, after Itlac had guaranteed them protection. And they were not disturbed.

CHAPTER XVII.

CONCLUSION.

The moon was high in the sky, and its white light, flooding the cuplike depression which held the town of the Snake Aztecs, gave a silvery glory to the mud huts and made the temple seem more mysterious than ever in the eyes of the Indians.

A hush had fallen on the town; the powerful snake god was angry. Under that anger Nekambo had fallen, and direful things were predicted if the desecrating white men from Tinijas did not leave with all speed.

Buffalo Bill wanted to see the body of Jim Granger before departing. He was taken to the spot where, it was said, the body could be seen; but the body of the treacherous sheriff of Conejos County was not there.

The scout was momentarily angered, suspecting trickery; but when he saw that the Indians were amazed, he began to think that some of Granger's friends had taken the body away, or that Granger had not been killed, but only wounded, and had taken himself away.

Not a Chinaman was to be found except the few who had been slain in the fighting; the others had crawled into holes somewhere, and the Indians would not rout them out.

"I guess the only prisoner we'll be able to take back to Tinijas," remarked the king of scouts, "will be White-eyed Hawkins."

"Ef he is thar whar we left him," Nomad added.

As the scout and his companions passed down toward the one easily accessible gate, escorted by Itlac's warriors, Donna Isabel appeared.

It was as they had anticipated—she had made up her mind to remain. But she no longer claimed that a binding promise forced Wild Bill Hickok to do the same; she had become ashamed of that, perhaps, as she did not even refer to it, though she saw that he was ready to depart with the others.

"I know that I shall not be able to make you understand how it is—how I feel about it," she urged; "but it is not wholly because I am an Indian that I want to stay here, nor entirely for the reason that they have made me their queen; it will be a better life for me. As a girl, singing and dancing in places like the Casino, there was no future before me; soon I should be too old even for that. Here I shall reign. Is it not better than dancing and singing in the Casino?"

She extended her hand, and Buffalo Bill took it; she was still in her Indian robes, and in the white moonlight she looked indeed queenly, in a barbaric fashion.

"I think you are right," he said simply. "But," he added, "don't let the Snake Aztec superstitions get the better of you; that is where your danger lies now. You may be able to do them good—these Indians; I am sure of it, if you try."

"Good-by," she said. "I may never see you again."

She said farewell to them, one by one; not even Little Cayuse was omitted.

"I am Indian, too," she said to him. "There are some good Indians that are not dead—you are one of them."

"Thet ain't no lie," Nomad approved, as the Piute shrank back, abashed by this attention.

"Der kvestion iss," said the baron, when she took his hand, "how can a Inchun py dhis willage in learn to sbeak Cherman, which iss a lankvich oof indelledtualidy?"

"Cut et out, baron," Nomad grumbled.

"The reason," she said, "it is simple: There was a German missionary here once who tried to convert these Indians, and they killed him."

"Ach, himmelblitzen! Vot a fool he vos!" cried the baron.

They passed out by the stone gate, close-herded by Itlac's braves, and, in the bright moonlight, went down the slope beyond the heavy walls.

They took but one prisoner back with them; that was White-eyed Hawkins. The "German Indian" they released.

But Wild Bill had been rescued, and that was victory and satisfaction enough.

THE END.

"Buffalo Bill's Mountain Foes; or, Pawnee Bill and the White Queen's Vengeance," is the story for the next issue. It tells of the strange and exciting climax of the Bills' hunt for the opium smugglers on the Mexican border. The smugglers, finding themselves almost run to earth, play their last card, and it comes very near being a trump. The story is literally a detective story, Indian story, and two or three other kinds of stories, all rolled into one. Then, too, the installment of the new serial in next week's issue is a bully one, and the many special articles are exceedingly interesting. Be sure to get No. 262, out in one week, on September 15th.

FIGHTING THE RUSTLERS;

Or, Ted Strong's Race with Death.

By EDWARD C. TAYLOR.

(This interesting story began in NEW BUFFALO BILL WEEKLY No. 260. If you have not read the preceding chapters, get the back number which you have missed from your news dealer. If he cannot supply you with it the publishers will do so.)

CHAPTER III.

OLD ACQUAINTANCES.

Ted made no motion to put up his hands, and the other three boys, who took their cue from him, remained in their saddles, just as they had been sitting before the marshal had given his command. Ted looked Lumpkin squarely in the eyes.

"Just a moment," he said. "I don't intend to submit to arrest without knowing what the charge is against me. Don't imagine that I'm at all afraid of you because I speak to you civilly. If I had wanted to, I could have ridden right out of here before your deputies got here, and you know very well that you couldn't have stopped me. Upon what charge do you intend to arrest us? We have a right to know that."

"On the charge of assaulting my son."

"Who makes the charge?"

"I do."

"That won't do. You were not here. You did not see any assault committed. You can't make any such charge. It wouldn't hold water, as you know very well."

"Then my son makes the charge."

"I haven't heard him make it yet. Just ask him whether we assaulted him or not."

Lumpkin beckoned his son forward, and was about to question him, when the old man who had at the first remonstrated with Hank for beating his horse pushed himself between the two.

"Look a-here, Lumpkin," he said. "I was here, an' I saw the whole thing. Those boys didn't assault Hank. He was beatin' that pony of yours most unmerciful, and one of 'em stopped him an' give him some good advice. Then he challenged him ter wrestle, an' Hank got throwed. Hank picked up a rock, an' was goin' to smash him over the head with it, only one of the fellers roped him in with his lasso. And he did it neatly, too; as slick a thing as ever I seed."

"What have you to say to that?" asked Lumpkin, turning to his son.

Hank hung his head and looked sheepish.

"As fur as I remember, I guess as how thet was ther way of it. I was pretty durn mad when ther feller throwed me, an' I felt like killin' him."

"Then what did you tell me that he assaulted you for?"

"I didn't."

"You did, too," said Lumpkin angrily. "You are getting to be a bigger fool every day. I don't know what's the matter with you. You are always getting into some trouble. Isn't it about time you were getting back to your work at the railroad telegraph office? Get there in a hurry. If you get fired out of that job, it's the last I'll ever get you. Hurry, now!"

Hank hastened off without a word. It was evident that he was very much afraid of his father.

"Now, you see," said Ted, "your son admits himself that he has no cause for complaint against us. I am sorry he was hurt in any way, but you can bank on it that he suffered no serious injury. I don't believe that you can find any charge now on which to arrest me."

Lumpkin stared at the cowboys for a long time in silence.

"You fellows escaped this time by the skin of your teeth. I don't mind telling you that I'd be delighted to have the job of locking the whole four of you up."

"I don't doubt it," said Kit Summers.

"Jumpin' sand hills!" said Bud Morgan; "he mightn't like it so all-fired well after he had tried it once or twice."

"Anything more to say, Mr. Marshal?" asked Ted.

"Perhaps he will accuse us of wearing out the streets of the town by riding our horses on it, and lock us up for that," said Ben Tremont.

"I'd like ter see ther inside of his old jail," said Bud. "I think I could carry ther whole thing away on my back."

"You will see the inside of it if you don't keep a civil tongue between your teeth when you are talking to me," said the marshal.

"I don't think that you have any room to talk," retorted Ted, "and I think that we will bid you good-by right away. You can rely on it that we don't intend to commit any breach of the peace, and you'll always find us ready to answer any charges against us."

The marshal was evidently very reluctant to let the boys go so easily, but he saw no other way out of it.

"You've made your escape mighty easy this time," he said, "but you may not get off so easy the next. I won't hold you now, but if I hear of your committing any other outrages, I'll get after you. And I have men here who are used to handling just such fellows as you. All your bluff won't save you the next time."

After saying this to Ted, the marshal turned to his deputies and dismissed them.

Then he jumped into his own buggy, and, giving orders at the grocery store for the buckboard in which Hank had been driving to be taken around to his house, whirled off himself in a cloud of dust.

"Our train does not get here till to-morrow afternoon," said Ted; "we'll have to find some place to stop in the meantime. I suppose that there's a hotel in this town, but I don't see it from here."

"I'd have asked the marshal where it was," said Ben Tremont, "only he might have locked us up for suspicious persons for asking him such a question."

The old man who had taken the part of the boys in the altercation with the marshal stepped forward.

"Say, boys," he said, "I like your looks, and it seemed to me that you acted all right in your scrap with Hank Lumpkin. Hank is all right, I guess, but sometimes he acts a little too fresh, in my humble opinion. He had no right ter beat that horse, and I'm glad you stopped him. My name is Wesley, and I'm president of the bank in this town. You can count on me for a friend, boys, whenever you need one. And if you are lookin' for a hotel to stop over in, you'll find that the Saybrook is pretty comfortable. If you tell them that Bill Wesley sent you there, they'll treat you right."

"I'm glad to meet you, Mr. Wesley," said Ted. "My name is Ted Strong. These are my friends, Kit Summers, Ben Tremont, and Bud Morgan. We are on our way down to Texas, where we are helping to run the Las Animas Ranch, in Dimmit County, and we are simply waiting over here to catch the next train out."

"It don't leave till to-morrow afternoon," said Wesley. "In the meantime, you'll find yourselves comfortable enough up at the Saybrook Hotel. I have to get back to the bank now, but the chances are that I'll see you again before you leave. That's the way up to the Saybrook."

He took himself off, and the young roughriders made their way to the hotel, which they found was a very comfortable inn, and where they had no difficulty in getting a good, hearty meal served to them and comfortable

rooms assigned, in which they could wash up and make themselves a little more presentable after their long ride. Their horses were taken care of by one of the servants and put up in the stalls at the back of the big frame structure which did service as a hotel.

"This is bully," said Kit, as the four came downstairs together and sat down to a hearty meal. "You can bet your life that we needed this meal pretty badly. There is nothing that will give a fellow an appetite like a good, long ride across country on the back of a lively little broncho."

"Ther nerve of that feller Lumpkin goldurn near took my appetite away," said Bud Morgan.

"It would take a whole lot more than that to kill my appetite," said Ben Tremont, "and I'm just about ready to give you boys an exhibition of what I can do in the way of eating and drinking. Here's our table, and the meal we ordered all set out ready for us."

The four boys sat down to a big, square table, which had been laid for the meal they had ordered before they went upstairs to wash. It was up at one corner of the room, and near it was a long table set ready for the accommodation of three or four people.

"There's going to be a dinner party," said Ted, glancing over at this table, while the other boys were preparing to pitch into the plates of soup that had been set before them, and noticing that it had been set and arranged with special care for a table in a country hotel. Ceriso was a much larger and more civilized place than the ordinary Western town, but it was not quite up to the East in its hotel appointments. At this table, however, the linen was spotless, and wineglasses were set at every place. More than this, just as Ted was starting to his own meal, he noticed that a waiter approached the table and set down a Manhattan cocktail beside each of the plates.

"Those fellows are going in for it in style," said Kit Summers, who also noticed this fact.

"Gee!" said Bud Morgan; "they must be swells!"

"They need appetizers before their meals, I see," said Ben Tremont, glancing at the cocktails. "I remember the time when I thought it was necessary to drink one of those before I ate anything. I used to think that a man couldn't live and be strong without a certain amount of liquor under his hide every day. I used to feel that I was quite weak and enervated when I didn't have a few drinks inside of me. That was after I left college, when I was hanging about New York, trying to see life, as I thought. Then Ted met up with me and gave me a pretty stiff lecture and told me that I'd have to quit right away. It was kind of a pull at first, but I felt better after, I can tell you. No more drink for me, and I guess I'm as strong as most people. And if anybody wants to argue the point and try my strength, I am always ready to oblige." Ben doubled up a mighty arm.

Ted laughed as he glanced at the big fellow.

"If ever I wanted to go around giving temperance lectures," he said, "I think that I'd take Ben around with me. And I bet that we would make a hit. I would say to the audience:

"Here's a temperance boy, a fellow that never drinks. Just look at him. There is the kind of physique you will have if you don't drink." Then Ben would step out and give a few exhibitions juggling heavy dumbbells and wrestling. And I bet that there would be a big rush to sign the pledge after the young fellows in the audience caught sight of his muscular development."

"I guess there would," said Kit Summers. "Say, Ben, were you living with Earl Rossiter when you were in New York?"

"Yes," drawled Ben. "And speak of angels——" He pointed toward the next table.

All four of the cattlemen stared with astonishment, open-eyed and silent, at the three figures that had entered the room and were now seating themselves at the next table. One of them was the man referred to as Earl Rossiter. There was no doubt about that. But how did he come there? And what was he doing in Ceriso? The boys had left him months before back at Sunset Ranch, away up in Dakota, and none of them had the faintest idea as to what could bring him all the way to the town of Ceriso, in southeastern California.

The appearance of the other two members of this party was no less surprising than that of Earl. One of them was no less a personage than Lumpkin, the marshal, who had threatened to arrest them or run them out of town that morning, and the other was a little, effeminate chap, whom Ted recognized at once! His name was Lew Tuttle. He was very foppish and exquisite in his dress and manner, and prided himself greatly on his learning and wisdom.

Tuttle had been a friend of Earl Rossiter at school, and later on had come out to visit him at the Sunset Ranch. He had met Ted, who at that time was engaged with his young range riders in running the Black Mountain Ranch, near by, and Ted suspected him of joining in several plots in which Earl Rossiter had been implicated, the purpose of which had been to disgrace Ted and to drive him out of the country.

Happily, Ted, with the assistance of his friends, had been able to get the better of the Sunset Ranch crowd in these schemes; but, needless to say, there was no love lost between the young roughriders and Earl Rossiter's crowd.

"Would ye look at them mavericks!" muttered Bud Morgan; "there they sit, drinkin' their cocktails an' thinkin', I dessay, that they're shore enough dead-game sports. They're hob an' nob with thet there Lumpkin, who is as ornery a maverick as ever I seed. I wonder ef they're plannin' some other game against us, ther way they did when they tried ter get you accused of hoss stealin'?"

"Don't speak so loud, Bud," said Ben; "they might hear you."

"It makes me sore to look at those two fellows, Rossiter and Tuttle. They have no right in a decent hotel, if the truth were known," said Kit Summers. "If they speak to me, I'll give them a piece of my mind."

"No use quarreling with them, Kit," said Ted; "we have never suffered any real harm from them in the past, although they used to make us a good deal of trouble up there at Black Mountain."

"How about that time they won two hundred dollars from you on a wild West sport contest, in which they only managed to defeat you by taking the powder out of your cartridges in the shooting match, and letting loose a wild bull at you in the steer-roping contest? How about that? It wasn't their fault that you were not killed by that bull."

"Well, that's all past and gone," said Ted; "we won't seek a meeting with them now, but as we are both at the same hotel, it is more than likely that we'll run up against them some time before to-morrow afternoon, when they leave. If we do meet them, we will have to be civil with them. They may have seen the error of their ways before this, and there's no use digging up old quarrels now. If there's any fighting to be done, let them start it."

"They'll start it fast enough if they think they have you where they need not fear you. They hate us like poison," said Ben Tremont.

Ted's lips drew together in a hard line, and his brown eyes opened wider, and brightened.

"If they do start it," he said, "they'll probably regret it. I'm on my guard against them now. But there is no use talking this way. We'll only get ourselves into a temper."

"I wonder how they come to be so solid with that there marshal," said Bud Morgan; "just look there at them. He's drinkin' away with them, an' they seem to be havin' a hilarious time! They've certainly ordered a swell meal. It takes that little snipe Tuttle to go in for the luxuries of life. That meal must be costin' them a pretty little amount of money."

Earl Rossiter and his two friends were out of ear-shot of the young roughriders, and, from the position of their table, the people sitting at it could not see those sitting at Ted's table, although the cowboys had an unobstructed view of them.

Earl Rossiter was the son of a millionaire, and had been indulged through life in every possible way. Lew Tuttle was another boy of the same stamp, although he had not Earl's courage, good look, or fine physique. Between them they had ordered as fine a dinner as the Saybrook could supply. They were not contented with the regular

meal that was served at the hotel, but had ordered one cooked especially for them. They had opened it with cocktails, and now, as Tuttle was sipping the champagne he had ordered served with the meal, he was grumbling in his weak, effeminate voice because oysters could not be procured, raw on the half shell, in the Middle West.

"Ith an outrage," he lisped. "I can't begin to enjoy my dinner unleth I have thome blue pointh or thome little neck clamth to begin with. Thith thampagne ith remarkably good, though. Have thome more of it, Mithter Lumpkin."

Lumpkin held forth his glass readily enough. It was seldom, indeed, that any one treated him to champagne; and, as for spending his own money on a bottle of it—he would never have dreamed of doing that. He was feeling very much pleased with himself. He had heard of, but never met, the fathers of both Rossiter and Tuttle, and he knew that they were extremely well off. Although Earl and Lew Tuttle were nothing but boys, and Lumpkin considered it generally quite beneath his dignity to converse at all with boys, the thought that he might later on become acquainted, through Earl and Lew, with two great financial magnates made him very anxious to cultivate their good opinions.

"You say that you have come down here to get into this rush for homesteads which is to come off pretty soon," he said, as he drained his champagne glass. "I can't see why you fellows want to get into a fight to procure a little prairie land from the government. The land that is to be opened up for settlers is situated some little distance from here. In fact, it is nearer Perkinsville than it is to this town. The scramble for the land won't come off for about a week yet, but this town and Perkinsville is getting pretty full of people already. But I don't see what you people want with a quarter section of land on the prairie that you have to race and ride for the way you will for this."

Earl and Tuttle laughed.

"We don't care about it for the money that there is in it," said Earl; "we can get plenty of that at home. But we have often heard of these rushes for newly opened land when the government gives the land away to the first claimant, and we wanted to see what one was really like, and, perhaps, get a little fun out of it. We pride ourselves on seeing life in all its phases, and this is one of the phases that we haven't seen yet."

"That'th right," lisped little Lew; "we are thtudenth of human nature. We want to thee all that there ith to be theen in thith world, and to make our liveth ath full of experientheth ath potherible."

"Oh, I see," said Lumpkin; "it is just a boyish prank of yours. I can see that you fellows are fond of fun and deviltry of all kinds. I like a boy with some spirit in him. You fellows suit me down to the ground. I have a son who resembles you very much. I have a hard time keeping him in order. Only this afternoon he got into a fight with a party of cowboys who had drifted in here and who insulted him. He's such a high-spirited fellow that he won't stand for an insult from any one. Not that I blame him much, for I don't think that a boy is worth his salt who has not a spice of the devil in him."

"When I came up the street, I saw that Hank—we call him Hank for short, although his real name is Algernon Henry—I saw that Hank, in spite of the fact that these big, drunken rowdies outnumbered him four to one, and were heavily armed to boot, had dragged one of them from his horse and was simply wiping up the street with him. I interfered, of course, but still I like the spirit of the boy. I tell you, those cowboys, or whatever they were, were afraid of him. They hadn't the courage to interfere to save their comrade, although they were four to one. I guess they won't meddle with Hank after this. I wish he could meet you fellows. There are no boys in this town fit for him to associate with, and it would delight him to meet some spirited, plucky young bloods of his own kind. You would like him if you met him."

Earl made a grimace to Lew Tuttle which Lumpkin did not see and which indicated that Earl was anything but desirous of meeting Hank. He made an effort to get Lumpkin off the subject of his son.

"It's lucky that you met us at the station," he said; "we had a letter of introduction to you, and that is why we came here instead of going on to Perkinsville. We knew that you held some official position in regard to the opening of these new lands, and we thought that you could put us on the right track."

"You can rely on me to do what I can for you," said Lumpkin, "for I don't mind telling you that I like your looks. If we had more young fellows of your stamp here, this town would be a much better place to live in. But it's hard to favor any one in these land deals. The government makes a great effort to be strict and impartial, and political pull really does not count for very much. We can go down to Perkinsville in a few days, and then you can get in line, as soon as the office is opened, to make your application. You may depend upon it that fellows of your standing will have all possible favors shown to them."

"I'm glad to hear it," said Earl Rossiter; "have a little more champagne."

Lumpkin liked the taste of the sparkling wine, and drank freely, talking meanwhile of his son Hank. Earl and Lew Tuttle listened with great politeness and with great apparent interest, although secretly they were bored to death. They could not imagine themselves associating with a common sort of fellow such as they knew Hank Lumpkin to be, and they laughed in their sleeves at the efforts made by the father to ingratiate himself with them.

At length the dinner was over, and Lumpkin rose to his feet. His cheeks were flushed, his eyes were bright, and his gait was a little unsteady. He was delighted at having made the acquaintance of two such fellows, and was already planning out in his mind the great advantages he might gain through his acquaintance with them.

"I am sorry to leave you, young gentlemen," he said, "but you know that a public official, such as I am, is a slave to his duty. Good afternoon, boys; I've had a splendid dinner."

Rossiter and Lew Tuttle rose politely and shook hands with him. He walked away rather unsteadily, but delighted with himself. He fancied that he had made a great impression upon the two boys, and had won their friendship forever. If he could have heard the conversation which took place after he left their table he might have changed his opinion.

Tuttle and Rossiter watched him until he had walked out of the front door of the hotel. Then they looked at each other and smiled contemptuously.

"Isn't that fellow the limit?" said Earl.

"Thimply fearful!" lisped Lew.

"But we have to stand in with him. He's United States marshal down here, and we want to pull the wool over his eyes on that little cattle-rustling scheme we have on hand. When we told him we had drifted in here to make claims of land from the government, he swallowed the bait, hook and all, and we'll be able to get away with the cattle we want without any trouble. It's pretty easy to pull the wool over the eyes of a fellow like this Lumpkin."

"Oh, ith eathy enough," said Tuttle, sipping languidly at his wine. "but it's thuch a fearful bore, you know. He talkth tho about that ridiculous thon of hith. He thayth that he wantth uth to know him. Did you eyer hear of anything like that?"

"Never, old chap," said Earl; "but we may be able to escape the son."

"I hope tho," said Tuttle, filling his glass again and lighting a Turkish cigarette.

"Now we'd just better outline things a little and see what it is we are going to do. We both need money to square ourselves with the old men. Our ranch was a failure. We know that there's a big cattle outfit coming in here to-night. We have got a gang of men who will run off with a big bunch of the cows. We can ship them north by the next town, have the brands changed, and afterward say we raised them at the Sunset Ranch. There's good profit in cattle at this time of year, and we ought to make two or three thousand each. That will be enough to pay those gambling debts we owe and keep our fathers from hearing about it. We can get money

from the governors fast enough so long as they don't know we have been gambling or anything like that."

"Yeth, that's a fair thtatement of the thituation," said Tuttle, "and I know that there are a gang of men hanging about here who are jutht the fellowth for our work. And I gueth we have fixed thith marthal all right, tho that he won't bother uth."

"We have to keep on the fair side of him, no matter what happens," said Earl; "he's an awful fool, and he's tickled to death at associating with us because our fathers are millionaires. He thinks that it would be a fine thing for his son Hank to have us for companions. Oh, my! Hank for a friend of ours! Lew Tuttle and Earl Rossiter, safe companions for young men! Wouldn't that jar you?"

And so the two young fellows lingered over their wine, jeering and laughing at a man who had been neglecting his official duty to eat with them and toady to them, thinking that he was a cleverer and more experienced man than they were, and that he could win their undying friendship and use them for his own ends and advancement. Instead of allowing him to use them, the boys were planning to use him, and at the same time make fun of him. Boys as they were, they had seen a great deal of the world, especially the lower and meaner side of it, and they could see through his professions of friendship at a glance. What was happening to Lumpkin happens to a great many men who seek to use others for their own ends by making friends of them. They find, when all is said and done, that they have been tools themselves, as like as not, and that the time and effort they have expended have been wasted.

It is a good rule to remember, as one goes through life, that the man generally finds in a fellow man what he has in his own heart. If he has self-interest and duplicity, he will find that in his friends. If he has honesty, uprightness, and manliness, he will find plenty of people about him with those qualities. Rossiter and Tuttle, however, did not look at things in this light. They continued their conversation, little thinking that there was some one just beneath the window at their elbow who was listening to every word they said.

CHAPTER IV.

EARL MEETS A YOUNG LADY.

About half an hour later, Earl Rossiter and Lew Tuttle sauntered out of the hotel, cigarettes hanging from their mouths, evidently pretty well contented with themselves and with the whole world. They glanced up and down the street and noticed the shops on both sides of it and the people passing up and down.

"Pretty lively little town," said Earl; "not a bit like the ordinary Western town. You see, this is a little bit of a railroad center, and there is some sort of civilization about it. It quite reminds me of a town back in the East."

"Quite," said Tuttle; "but how in Heaven's name are we to thpend the afternoon? I wantth to meet the bunch of fellowth that were to ruthle thothe cowth at eight. The herd is going to camp outthide the town, and there will be no trouble."

"We want to watch out," said Earl; "this cattle rustling is a pretty dangerous business."

"I've taken every porthible precaution," said Lew; "we thimply can't fail."

"And you are sure that it will be possible to ship the cows from a point up the line to-morrow afternoon?"

"Early to-morrow morning," said Lew. "There's a thiding up there. My fawther uthed to be prethident of thith road, you know, and I know all the thitation math-ters. There's a thiding where there are a lot of empty carth about fifteen mileth away. I've fixed it tho the cattle will be put in them and tho the conductor on the northbound train will thtop to couple them on. I telegraphed to the divithion thuperintendent over my fawther's thignature tho that he will attend to it and not the thlight-eth thuthpithion will be directed toward uth."

"You have a great head on you," said Earl admir-

ingly; "that scheme is mighty well thought out, in my opinion."

"Aw, pretty good—pretty good," said Tuttle loftily; "I gueth it will work."

"It's sure to."

"But the trouble ith that it ith thuth a bore waiting here."

"So it is; but just look across the street!"

Earl was looking across the street, and Lew followed his gaze. Approaching them on the opposite side of the way was a girl of fifteen or sixteen. She was poorly dressed, but undeniably pretty. She had black hair and eyes, a pink-and-white skin, and her bearing had in it a great deal of distinction and grace in spite of her poor attire.

"Greath Thcott!" said Lew; "ithn't the a thtunner!"

"She's a peach," said Earl enthusiastically; "the prettiest girl I've seen in a month of Sundays."

"Look at her clothes," said Lew; "the ith poor, I'll bet."

"Poor, but good looking," said Earl; "we won't have much trouble winning a smile from her."

The boys glanced in the direction of the girl and coughed as loudly as they could to attract her attention. But, contrary to their expectations, she did not look up. She kept her eyes fixed modestly on the ground, although her cheeks reddened a little, and, walking on past the boys, disappeared into a store of some sort farther down the street.

"What do you think of that?" said Earl.

"Very coquettish," said Lew; "let'th croth over."

"We can catch her eye, all right, when she gets out of the store and starts back," said Earl; "she will have to walk right past us."

The boys crossed over and stationed themselves so that when the girl left the store she had entered she could not miss seeing them.

They had to wait for only a few minutes. Presently the girl appeared again. She certainly saw the boys and certainly heard the efforts they made to attract her attention. At first they coughed, but, seeing that the girl did not look their way, they whistled. The girl was coming back in the direction from which she had appeared before she entered the store, and, of necessity, she was approaching the two boys, who spread themselves out across the sidewalk so that there seemed no chance of her passing them.

She came right on, nevertheless, as though she had never seen them at all. Her eyes were fixed on vacancy over their heads, but her cheeks were flaming red. Both fellows were a little under the influence of the wine they had taken, and, besides that, they thought that they could do about what they pleased in a little, out-of-the-way place like Ceriso. The girl was very shabby looking as to dress, and they had not the first idea that she would be seriously offended, or anything but pleased, in fact, with their actions.

As she came nearer, they coughed and whistled and chirped louder than ever.

"Isn't she a beauty?" said Earl.

"The ith all right," said Tuttle.

They addressed these remarks to each other, but they said them very loud on purpose, so that the girl would hear them. She was now opposite to them, and Lew stepped forward, with his hat in his hand.

The girl edged away from him, trying to pass him without looking at him or touching him. This brought her over to where Earl was standing. He saw that at close quarters she was better-looking than ever. Bashfulness had never been a fault of Earl Rossiter's. He placed himself so that the girl could not pass him, and took off his hat.

"How do you do?" he said. "May I not have the pleasure of escorting you home?"

The girl raised her eyes to meet Earl's. They were bright and black and blazing with anger.

"Let me pass, please," she said; "I don't want any escort."

She tried to push past the fellow, but he kept in her way, and attempted to seize her arm. Then he was treated to a big surprise, for the black-eyed girl struck him a resounding slap across the face which nearly blinded

him and sent him staggering. The girl had put all her strength into the blow, and she was mad clear through.

"Now will you let me pass and mind your own business?" she said angrily.

Earl recovered himself in an instant.

"Let you pass?" he said, forcing a laugh and trying to appear as if the slap had not hurt him. "I guess not! That was a fearful blow you struck me. I'll have a kiss for that."

Again he placed himself in the path of the girl. She struck at him again, but Earl was expecting it this time, and he caught her hands in his.

"Now," he said, "you won't object to giving me a kiss for that blow you struck me, will you?"

Evidently the girl did object, for she struggled furiously with Rossiter, who was trying to draw her toward him. At first she did not scream, thinking that she could fight her way clear, but she found that Earl was much stronger than she had thought, and was dragging her nearer and nearer to him. He slipped one arm around her neck, and she screamed. She fought wildly, but he held her all the tighter. He probably would not have dared to act this way if he had not been drinking, but the blow she had struck him had aroused all the anger and stubbornness in his nature, and he determined to get the better of this girl and bend her will to his, come what might of it.

"You can't object to me!" he panted, as she fought with him; "just one kiss and then I'll let you go!"

"Let me go!" screamed the girl. "Oh, won't somebody help me?"

"I'll let you go," panted Earl, "when——" He never finished his sentence, for at that moment something hit him on the side of the jaw. It was a fist, and it was as hard as iron. There was a sinewy, muscular arm and shoulder behind it, and it hit with a force that made him fling his hands up into the air and roll down to the ground like a log.

Meanwhile, Tuttle had uttered a wild scream of fright, for some one had caught hold of him from behind, lifted him half off his feet by his coat collar, and, with a violent and well-directed kick, sent him head over heels into the gutter.

The girl drew back with an expression of great relief. Her face paled, and it looked for a moment as though she was going to faint. But she steadied herself with an effort. In the meantime, Rossiter lost no time in getting on his feet again. He found facing him the person above all others whom he least expected and least wished to see—Ted Strong.

A little distance off was Kit Summers. Kit was evidently in a violent rage. He was gazing at Lew Tuttle, who lay in the gutter, where Ted had just thrown him. Earl lost no time after he saw who it was that had knocked him down. He was in a violent rage now, half crazed with anger, and he would have fought any one who interfered with him.

Without a word he made a rush at Ted. Ted avoided it easily, and landed a hard left in his face, which sent him staggering. Again Earl made a rush. This time he held his right hand raised in the air, and there was something bright gleaming in it.

It descended upon Ted, but again Ted dodged, and caught Earl Rossiter by the wrist. There was a fierce, brief struggle, which could not have lasted more than a few seconds at the most. Then something flashed through the air, and a hunting knife, which Earl had been holding in his hand, clattered against the stones of the road.

The girl in whose behalf Ted had interfered watched the struggle, with her hands clasped tight in front of her. She saw Earl draw the knife, and she gasped as she saw it. Then she saw Ted catch him by the wrist, twist it out of his grasp, and throw it away.

Then she saw the two young men wrestling together for a moment. It did not take Ted long to overpower his opponent now. The very fury of Earl's rage interfered with his fighting, for it made him wild, and he was soon sent staggering to the ground. He picked himself up slowly, facing Ted and brushing the dust from his clothes.

"So you are here," he muttered. "I didn't expect ever to see your face again."

"I can't say that I ever expected to see yours," said Ted; "but we have met again, it seems. You see, we never know what to expect."

Earl had recovered his composure by this time and had succeeded in removing the greater part of the dust from his garments.

"I suppose that you consider it a pretty smart trick to sneak up behind me and hit me a blow like that."

"Not at all," said Ted; "I did not know who you were until after I had struck you. I saw some one abusing a girl who was calling for help, and I interfered."

"Well, you needn't have interfered," said Earl; "I was only fooling, and so was the girl. You didn't suppose that I was going to hurt her, did you?"

"I didn't suppose anything," said Ted; "I know what I saw, and it looked mighty like holding that girl against her will."

"Ask her," said Earl.

"She has gone now," said Ted; "I just saw her slip around the corner. I can't say that I want to have much more to say to you. If, as you say, you were only fooling, it would be a good thing to remember that that kind of fooling is not always appreciated, and that it doesn't pay to try it too often."

Earl made no answer, and Ted, in company with Kit Summers, turned and walked away. Rossiter and Tuttle, who had picked himself up out of the gutter and joined his companion, glared after them.

"Rude, low fellowth!" said Tuttle.

"They make me sick, but I'm glad I know they are here," said Earl. "I'll fix this cattle-rustling business up so that Lumpkin will put them in jail for it, and they'll find it a pretty hard thing getting out again. I'll make them sorry they ever came to this town. We will have no trouble in managing the marshal here, and we'll make things pretty hot for those fellows. I don't know what they came here for, but I do know that they will stay here longer than they expect."

CHAPTER V.

A STRANGE GIRL.

Ted was seated in his room at the hotel that evening when one of the bell boys came upstairs and knocked at the door.

"Some one downstairs to see you," he said, when Ted opened it.

"Who is it?" asked Ted, in surprise, for he could think of no one in the town of Ceriso who would call upon him. At first he thought it might be Tuttle or Rossiter, but, after his recent encounter with them, it struck him as being extremely unlikely that either of them would call upon him.

"Didn't give no name," said the bell boy, and he chuckled audibly.

Ted stared at the boy. "I wonder who it is," he said.

"Better come down and see," said the boy; and Ted finally came to this decision himself.

He followed the little fellow downstairs into one of the parlors of the hotel on the ground floor.

"In there," said the boy, and Ted went inside.

There was a figure seated in one of the armchairs. It arose as Ted entered, and in an instant he recognized the girl he had saved from further annoyance at the hands of Earl Rossiter that afternoon. She stepped forward to meet the young cattleman, and stood before him, blushing and hesitating.

Ted saw that she was very pretty, but that there was a certain look of defiant pride in her eyes that gave her an expression not altogether pleasant. Her dress was a little worn and shabby, but the light shirtwaist she wore was clean and neat, and, in spite of her attire, the girl's appearance was decidedly attractive. She had full, red lips and a beautiful expression, and as Ted looked at her he thought to himself that it was natural enough for Earl to want to kiss her.

He waited silently until the girl spoke.

"You are Mr. Theodore Strong, I believe," she said hesitatingly. "I learned your name from the clerk at

the hotel here. He didn't want to let me see you at first. He said that you were a friend of Mr. Wesley, the banker, and didn't want to be bothered by the likes of me! But I said I was going to see you, and when I make up my mind to do a thing, I generally do it."

The black eyes of the girl flashed as she spoke, and Ted, noticing them, decided that this was a young woman with considerable will of her own. He also noticed that her hands, which were nervously smoothing out her skirt as she spoke, were hardened and roughened, that she had no gloves, and that her voice and language were a little different from those of the girls he had been used to associate with. But, for all this, he did not abate one jot of his respect toward her, and treated her with as fine a courtesy as though she had been the first lady in the land.

"I came around to thank you," she said, "for taking my part this afternoon. I was scared for the first time in a good many years, and didn't know what to do. It certainly did me good to see the way you handled that fellow. I'm pretty poor, and my father has a pretty bad name for cattle rustling about here, and people think that they can treat me as they want. But they can't, and I was so surprised when I saw some one take my part and fight for me. You see, I'm not the kind of girl you would care to talk to, I guess. I'm not refined or well educated like some girls. I should like to be, but I ain't never had no chance. I was pretty poor all my life, an' had to work hard, and ain't never had no chances. But I made up my mind that I was comin' around to thank you for what you done for me. I ain't never had nobody take my part that way before. People generally make fun of me an' all that."

There was a suspicion of moisture in the eyes of the girl, and her voice broke a little as she spoke. She came to a stop for a moment.

Ted noticed her worn, rough hand lying against the velvet-covered arm of the chair in which she sat. The fingers, with the short, stubby nails, broken by hard housework, were plucking nervously at the velvet, and the girl was evidently struggling bravely to keep from breaking down. She had been used to ill treatment and discourtesy all her life, and she could stand that well enough. But a little kindness, a little deference that he had shown her, had moved her to tears, which she would have scorned to shed on any other occasion. Ted understood her, and his heart was touched. Without thinking what he did, he reached out his hand and touched hers. Her fingers closed around it for a moment. Then she remembered herself, and drew herself up suddenly, pushing his hand away from hers.

"Thanks!" she said. "You seem somehow to understand me, and yet you don't know me. Other people can't."

"You have nothing to thank me for," said Ted; "I only interfered in your case as any other man would have interfered."

"No other man did," said the girl. "The people that know me and my family only laugh when they see things like that. They would only laugh if they thought that I were trying to get better and finer, or hoped ever to be anything more than I am. But I must stop talking this way. I didn't come here just to thank you. I have something else to say. I heard something to-day that I knew that I ought to tell some one about. Most people treat me disrespectfully, but somehow I knew that you were different and that you would listen to me, for you have kind eyes and a good face."

"What is it that you want to tell me?" asked Ted wonderingly.

"I heard something, or, at least, my brother heard something, that you ought to know, I think. It was about you, partly. When I heard it I determined to come to you and see you and tell you about it. It's about those fellows that insulted me to-day. They have a plot to steal some cattle, and they hate you, I know that much; they knew you before somewhere. When Jim, that's my brother, told me about it, I made up my mind that you ought to know. It was sort of hard for me to come here to the hotel and ask for you, for I knew that the clerk and the people hanging about would laugh at me, but I thought that if I could help you or save you from get-

ting into trouble, I would do anything. You did something for me, and I want to show you that no matter what people say about me, or how they laugh at me, that I am grateful."

Ted was interested at once. He was touched, as well, for there was something pathetic in the manner of this girl, who had been used to harsh treatment all her life.

"I'll see to it that the clerk doesn't laugh at you," he said; "nobody about here will bother you much, or I will know the reason why. Now tell me how you overheard this plot you were speaking of. Tell me everything you know about it."

"My name is Rose Casey," said the girl. "My father has a pretty bad name about here for cattle rustling and the like of that, but people is afraid of him some, I guess, and they dassent molest him much," she added, dropping into her habitual manner of speech. "One of my brothers, Jim, works about the hotel here. He told me that he was hangin' about the yard, outside one of the dining-room windows, when he heard two fellers talkin' together. It seems that they was rich young fellers, but that they needed some money in a hurry. They had lost a lot of money gamblin', an' they didn't want their fathers to find out about it."

"Jim was interested when he heard them talkin', so he sneaked up clost to the window, an' listened. I suppose a swell gentleman like you an' your friends wouldn't do such a thing, but it's different with Jim. He was brought up kinder careless, though I always done what I could to have him grow up a nice, good boy, an' he is a good boy, too. He heard that they was plannin' to hire a lot of men to rustle some cows from an outfit which is ter camp near ther town to-night. The outfit is owned by Slaughter, the big Dakota an' Montana cattleman. Perhaps you have heard of him."

"I have," said Ted; "he did me a good turn once. I was encamped with a herd of mine near his at a place called Salt Licks, and he helped me to run down a pretty tough character named Roaring Bill."

"Well," continued Rose Casey, "this Slaughter, as you know, is pretty well known, an' he is sendin' a big herd here ter be shipped. These fellers, I think Rossiter is the name of one of them, have hired a bunch of fellers—a pretty tough crowd—I know 'em all, though, thank Heaven, my father nor my brother ain't one on 'em—to rustle a thousand of the cattle, and later on Jim heard them talkin' again. They knew you was in town; then, I reckon it was after they got fresh to me, an' you had the scrap with them—and they was plannin' ter lay the blame ter you. They have this feller Lumpkin, the marshal, on their side. Lumpkin is honest enough, but he's a chump. He thinks because these here boys are ther sons of rich men that they are all right. They'll fix it so that ther blame will be laid to you four fellers that come here together."

"Nobody knows you in town, and you'll have a hard time provin' your innocence. Lumpkin ain't got no use for you, fer you had some kind of a scrap with his son Hank, a big, freckle-faced feller what works as a telegraph operator down to the railroad station. They have planned how they'll send their men out an' make an attack on the cattle outfit and rustle off all the steers they want. There ain't been no rustlin' around here in years, an' there ain't a big outfit watchin' the cows. They're to camp out on the prairie, near ther town."

Ted had been listening with head bowed all the while the girl was speaking. He had been thinking deeply. Now he raised his head and asked her a question. "Is Slaughter here with the outfit?" he asked.

"I guess not," said Rose; "he don't never get down here."

"This thing is to come off to-night?"

"To-night, before the moon rises."

"Do Rossiter and Tuttle, the two boys who insulted you, intend to be there themselves?"

"Jim says they do."

"How many men with them?"

"Five, I think."

"All right," said Ted; "I have a whole lot to thank you for."

"Oh, don't say anything about that," said the girl, her face flushing with pleasure. "I'm only too glad."

"I wonder if you would grant me a favor?"

"Just try me," said Rose eagerly; "just tell me anything I can do for you."

"If you have a horse, I would like you to guide me to-night to the place where this herd is encamped. Will you do it?"

"You bet I will!"

TO BE CONTINUED.

ALL RIGHT WITH THE GOVERNOR

When Governor Head was in office in New Hampshire, Colonel Barrett, of the governor's staff, died, and there was an unseemly scramble for the office, even while his body was awaiting burial with military honors. One candidate ventured to call upon Governor Head.

"Governor," he asked, "do you think you would have any objections if I were to get into Colonel Barrett's place?"

The answer came promptly: "No, I don't think I should have any objections, if the undertaker is willing."

HIGHLANDER SCORES BULL'S-EYE.

An English military journal relates a story of a Highlander who, on being shown over a man-of-war for the first time in his life, was keenly interested in all he saw. The marines seemed particularly to impress him, and, going up to one, he pointed to the marine's cap and asked him what it was. The marine, anxious to score off the visitor, looked at him in surprise.

"Don't you know what it is?" he asked. "Why, that's a turnip, of course."

"Man," replied the Scot impatiently, "I was no axin' about yer head."

A RISE IN BREAKFAST FOOD.

A small boy appeared at the back door of a neighbor's house and said to the matron who opened the door: "Good morning."

"Good morning," the housewife returned, somewhat curiously.

"I came over to tell you something."

"Well, what is it?"

"Last evening my papa was angry because the water boiled out of the steamer under the rolled oats."

"Is that so?"

"Yes. And then he made up his mind to fix the steamer, so that it couldn't happen again."

"What did he do?"

"He put some water in the steamer, and then soldered it all up."

"Is that what you came over to tell me?"

"Yes, and to borrow your stepladder."

"What do you want with the stepladder?"

"I want it so father can scrape the rolled oats off the ceiling."

WANTED TO SEE SCHMIDOWITZ.

One day a man who was interested in social work went into the tenement district, and, wishing to see a certain man, but having only a general idea as to where he lived, approached a small boy.

"My boy," he asked, "can you show me where Mr. Schmidowitz lives?"

"Yes, sir. Come right with me, sir."

The boy entered an adjacent doorway and started to climb the difficult stair. Up four flights he went, the visitor breathlessly following, and finally paused at an open door.

"This is the floor, sir," said the boy. "Mr. Schmidowitz lives in there."

"Looks as if we had stacked up against hard luck," remarked the visitor, peering into the room. "Mr. Schmidowitz doesn't appear to be here."

"No, sir," was the rejoinder; "that was him sittin' down on the front doorstep when we came in."

THE NEWS OF THE WORLD.

Falling Tank Causes Fatalities.

Thirteen excursionists were killed, eight dangerously wounded, and others less seriously hurt when a twenty-five-thousand-gallon tank toppled from a steel tower, one hundred feet high, on the bank of the Milwaukee River, and crashed onto crowded decks of the whaleback *Christopher Columbus*, on which were teachers and pupils of the Northwestern University, University of Chicago, and other summer schools.

More than four hundred passengers were aboard. Most of the passengers were either Chicagoans or temporary residents there attending school. Thousands of gallons of water, loosed by the bursting tank, flooded every deck and stateroom. Many passengers, seeing the rush of water, with visions of a repetition of the *Eastland* disaster, leaped into the river.

One young woman's body was found almost nude, her clothing torn from her in the crash. One woman was taken out of the wreckage almost dead. One of her legs had been torn off. Later the leg was found floating. A rescue party picked up a floating arm. In the midst of the desolation, the Reverend William P. O'Connor, formerly assistant pastor of St. Rose's Church, passed among the dead and wounded, uttering requiems and consolation. The accident occurred in the Milwaukee River, at the point where the river enters a basin formed by the junction of the Milwaukee and Menominee Rivers. The cause, it is said, was the failure of the tugboats to keep the steamer clear of the east bank. The bow of the steamer swung into one of the steel supports of the tank tower.

In the wheelhouse, Quartermaster Brady tugged frantically at the wheel. On the bridge the captain was hoarsely shouting orders to bring the vessel about.

"Back her!" yelled Captain Moody. "For Heaven's sake, back her out!"

Slowly the vessel responded to its engines. Slowly the steel tower began to give way. The steel tank swayed to and fro. The passengers leaped back from the deck rails.

"Look out; it's coming!" yelled a voice.

With a crash that was heard over an area of many city blocks, the mass of metal plunged onto the pilot and the upper decks like a muffled clap of thunder. For a moment there was dead silence; then came the hoarse voice of Captain Moody.

"Oh, Lord!" he cried frantically; "and I begged 'em to pull me clear; they wouldn't do it!"

How he escaped none knew. The bridge, the wheelhouse, and the two upper decks were a mass of wreckage.

Fear Drives Woman to Exile and Death.

A seven-year mystery over the disappearance of a wealthy Philadelphia widow has been cleared as a result of her recent death in Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania. She lived in exile, under an assumed name, in the mistaken fear that she would be sent to jail in an alienation suit.

The woman was Mrs. Louisa Schada, widow of Anthony F. Schada, a wealthy lumber merchant of Philadelphia,

who died nearly thirty years ago. Mrs. Schada died under the name of Mrs. Anna Lewis, in the presence of friends who gave her a home, seven years ago, because she was a widow of a Mason.

Not until these friends, Mr. and Mrs. A. J. Penrod, of Swissvale, a suburb of Pittsburgh, examined the contents of a little black bag that was Mrs. Schada's sole possession during her exile, did they learn that she was the owner of an estate valued at more than thirty-five thousand dollars.

It also was learned that Mrs. Schada left her home and broke all connections with relatives and friends because she believed an alienation suit, started by the divorced wife of her son, would result in her being sent to prison.

Somewhere Mrs. Schada had heard, and only half understood, something about the statute of limitations. She believed that if she could hide herself for seven years, the woman who first broke up her home, and then sued for twenty-five thousand dollars, would be unable to harm her.

The seven years had expired, and papers found in the little bag showed that the woman was preparing to reveal her identity to her friends in Swissvale and return to Philadelphia to claim her estate. But a few weeks ago she suffered an attack of pneumonia, and the strain of the last seven years was more than her seventy-two years could endure.

Mrs. Schada's son and only direct heir is now in China with a detachment of the United States Marine Corps. He joined after giving up all hope of finding his mother, convinced that she was dead. A cablegram has been sent to him, notifying him of his mother's discovery and death.

Mrs. Schada lived with her son until her disappearance. About eight years ago the son married a motion-picture actress. He had six hundred dollars left to him by his father, but it was not long before the actress ran through the little fortune. The woman then tried to make Mrs. Schada give up her part of the estate left by the elder Schada. She failed, and quarrels ensued. The actress left young Schada, and he got a divorce.

A suit for twenty-five thousand dollars, charging alienation of affections, then was started by the actress against Mrs. Schada, who worried constantly. Quietly she put her affairs in shape, and one day she disappeared.

Albert Dietrich, of North Woodbury, New Jersey, who acted as executor of the estate, and the son immediately started a search. After two years, Dietrich gave up.

Two years ago the first clew of Mrs. Schada's whereabouts was found, but, after a short investigation, relatives decided that it amounted to nothing. A relative of the missing woman was going through a Pittsburgh restaurant, when she met Mrs. Schada face to face. "Aren't you Mrs. Schada?" she asked, gasping with astonishment.

"Why, no," said the woman; "there must be some mistake. My name is Mrs. Anna Lewis."

Before the relative could stop her, Mrs. Schada slipped hurriedly out of the place and lost herself in a crowd.

According to the terms of Mrs. Schada's will, the bulk of her property is given to her son. The sum of one thousand dollars was given to the nurse who had cared for Mrs. Schada during her stay at Wildwood, New Jersey, whither she moved after the death of her husband. A large amount was set aside for Mr. and Mrs. Penrod.

Girl and Dog Lost in Mountains.

Ellen Grimes, four, and her trusty bulldog, Bob, have been found, safe and sound, after being lost forty-eight hours in the mountains. They were twelve miles away from the Grimes home, at Boulder, Colorado, when recovered.

Ellen and Bob wandered away recently, and as soon as the first search proved they were really lost, Mike Grimes, Ellen's father, summoned help and bloodhounds for tracking. After following for a few hours the tortuous and perilous trail picked out by the girl and dog, the keeper of the bloodhounds gave up in exhaustion. He handed the leashes over to a sturdy veteran miner.

In less than four hours the veteran fell down a fifty-foot cleft in the rocks and was seriously injured. The dogs were in charge of the eighth set of keepers when they found the lost girl.

Aside from picking porcupine quills from Bob's nose, the doctor who accompanied the searchers wasn't called on to do anything.

Famine of Wedding Rings in European Countries.

The scarcity of wedding rings has reached such a stage in belligerent countries that if war continues much longer, bridal couples will have to adopt the aluminum bands made in the trenches or do away with the regulation ring altogether. Sometimes even now a ring long worn by the bride is used in the ceremony, or a ring of the bridegroom, cut smaller.

In England the shops no longer sell the plain gold or silver ring because the merchants all have been sold out. The goldsmiths have been doing military service nearly three years, and women do not think it worth while to try to learn a trade which the men will take up as soon as they return home. It used to be a rule in European countries that only the plain ring should be used in the marriage ceremony, but in emergency times like these "fery old ring" is called on, and people don't appear to attach nearly as much importance to the style of band about the finger as in other times. The ceremony is now the thing, and, as long as that is performed, details have become of quite secondary consideration.

"There are no longer any old maids in England," remarked an officer recently. He was an Englishman visiting in Paris. He added that the Tommy just twenty-five in his regiment who was not married was the exception. "War came along and settled the question for the country," he said. "Girls in our town we had thought would have to be old maids surprised the community by marrying, some of them on a few hour's notice.

"Many were engaged only long enough to get some new sort of a frock—not a wedding gown, by any means, for dressmakers and milliners are not doing anything of a business, and have not for two years. The great majority of the war brides work in ammunition factories or do their bits in some other way, and if they had had fancy they could not have worn it.

"Our soldiers don't marry haphazard, even though they

do make up their minds overnight. At least they wish to do some measure of good, and in marrying girls without means they are aiding their country as well. And if they do not return, the pension to a soldier's widow helps out. Aside from sentiment, the men see the practical side of it. A soldier is less lonesome in the trenches if he knows some one is worrying about him and that he has a wife at home who will write often. It does make a bachelor feel forlorn to listen to his comrades chat about their home life!

"All the young soldiers have at least one sweetheart on the string, and it is probable she sends him an encouraging word occasionally. Like enough in one of his letters he mentions marriage, and then correspondence becomes brisk, and the engagement is on. During his furlough the wedding takes place. Often the engagement and wedding both materialize in the few days Tommy is at home. The wedding journey is frequently only from the bride's town to the port where the soldier has to embark."

Woman Fights Way Out of Bug Cloud.

A cloudburst of bugs, hard-shelled, chestnut-colored creatures, deluged the home of Byron Zimmerman, a farmer, near Leetonia, New York, at dusk one day not long ago.

They were not June bugs, but probably late May bugs. Not so large as the common or garden variety of June bugs, they were well protected with fuzz. Mrs. Zimmerman rushed into the yard to see what was up, and was suddenly surrounded by a great swarm of the insects. She fought her way with difficulty to the house. The roar of the bug storm could be heard hundreds of feet, according to a neighbor, Jefferson Freed. The bugs camped all night in the yard, but were gone when Zimmerman got up the next morning.

Bank Is Forced to Close.

Graham & Sons' Bank, 659 West Madison Street, the oldest and largest private bank in Chicago, has been forced to close its doors. A receiver of the United States District Court is in charge. Receivership proceedings started in the circuit court had been anticipated by involuntary proceedings in the Federal court. The institution's deposits exceed four million dollars.

While members of the Graham family declare the assets are sufficient to pay depositors dollar for dollar, it is known the institution has been insolvent since before the death, fourteen months ago, of Andrew J. Graham, its founder.

At the death of the father, the sons, Frank and Ralph, found a serious situation. They turned into the bank the six hundred thousand dollars proceeds from the life insurance of their parent in an attempt to save it. Their efforts were fruitless. A combination of circumstances was responsible for the crash.

Mrs. Minnie P. Graham, widow of Andrew J. Graham, has come to the rescue of her sons, and has turned over to the bank all the property left to her by her husband. This includes all the real estate owned by Graham at his death, amounting to between eight hundred thousand dollars and one million dollars.

This action by Mrs. Graham was preceded by an animated discussion between attorneys representing the different interests involved in the failure of the bank, Gar-

ing which the point had been raised as to how the depositors, which are numbered by thousands, could have any rights to the real estate as long as Mrs. Graham held personal title to the property.

Demand for Coins Stops Mint Vacations.

Employees in all United States mints, including the Denver branch, will have no vacations this year. The demand for minor coins—pennies, nickels, dimes, and quarters—is so great that all mints are working constantly to turn out the necessary money.

For the last few weeks three government experts have been busy checking up the amount of metal bullion, the number of coins, and examining the vaults of the Denver mint.

It is estimated that the Denver mint has turned out sixty million coins of many denominations this year. This means an increase of twenty million coins over the output of the local mint in any former year.

Three Cattlemen Dead in Feud.

Marion M. Ballew, Frank Lucy, and Edward Neely, all cattlemen of near Cookson, Cherokee County, Oklahoma, are dead as the result of an old feud that suddenly flamed into deadly action.

It is reported that a Neely branding iron was stamped over the Ballew brand on a calf a few weeks ago. This brought the feud to an acute stage. Ballew rode to Neely's house and called him out. Neely was shot dead. Ballew then rode to Lucy's ranch. The two men exchanged a fusillade of shots, and Lucy was killed. Ballew turned on his horse, and a shot from Lucy's house, supposed to have been fired by his son, dropped Ballew, fatally wounded.

When a physician reached Ballew, he was asked if he had anything to say before the end.

"No. I did this for the good of the county," he replied.

Marion Ballew was a deputy sheriff of Cherokee County during the first three years of Statehood, and, following that, was one of ten bonded district game wardens of the State under Governor Cruce. Neely was a cattleman and Lucy was also in the cattle business, but not so extensively.

Cookson is in a wild section of Cherokee County. There have been rumors of cattle stealing in that section for many years, but this is the first time it has resulted in a killing.

Trades Town Section for Ready-made City.

G. W. Humphrey has traded an east section of Pingree, North Dakota, for the town of Alaskia. The city which he acquires includes lumber yards, elevator, implement shop, hardware store, blacksmith shop, coal sheds, dwelling, and a five-and-a-half-acre town site located on the Great Northern Railroad, about ten miles north of Casselton.

Man Smiles When Horse Kicks Leg Off.

While Constable "Jim" Martin, of Darby, Pennsylvania, was carrying a horse, the animal suddenly let loose a terrific kick. With a snap the constable's leg flew off, hitting the barn door, ten feet away.

Smiling benevolently, the constable hopped over and picked up the member. He found it slightly in need of repairs, but still good for years of service.

The constable's leg, which is of wood, is noted for its durability. Five years ago he took it out hunting with him, and when his shotgun exploded accidentally, the leg got the full charge.

About three years ago a dog attacked him, sinking its teeth in the knee joint. The constable sighed wearily, and straightened out his leg, closing the joint on the dog's teeth. When the animal went away, he left two teeth in the joint.

Clock Running One Hundred and Twenty-seven Years.

J. D. Gwin, of Sharon, South Carolina, has a "grandfather" clock that he believes holds the record for age and continuous time-keeping service of a perfectly satisfactory character. He is able to trace its age back one hundred and twenty-seven years, and is of the opinion that it is much older.

The works were brought over from England, and the frame of black walnut, inlaid with maple, was made in this country by a cabinet maker named Samuel Gill.

The clock has never ceased to keep accurate time, not a penny has been spent on it for repairs of any sort, and its present condition is excellent.

No Market for Wild Burros.

Over two hundred wild burros, rounded up by Apache County cowboys, may have to be turned loose again on the mesas of northern Arizona unless some way is found to market them.

Not long ago it was proposed that the thousands of wild burros now roaming the ranges of Arizona be captured and their flesh converted into sausages for the Allies' armies. The hides were to be made into sole leather. Cowmen in northern Arizona were enthusiastically in favor of any plan that would rid the range of the little burros, and a preliminary round-up of two hundred was shortly effected. Now that the burros are corralled, nobody seems to want them, either for "esel-wurst" or for their hides.

What to do with those now rounded up and how to market the thousands still at large after they have been captured is a problem that will probably be put up to the State defense council.

Big Rat Invasion of Ohio.

A rat invasion threatens the very foundation of the Buckeye State. Corn cribs, chickens, and even cats have been helpless before the tide of rodents that make living a menace in many parts of the State. So bold have they become that farmers in Highland County are going to take a day off soon for a country-wide rat hunt. Secretary Shaw, of the State agricultural board, says the menace is serious.

Little Girl Falls in Deep Well.

The two-and-one-half-year-old daughter of Mr. and Mrs. Pete Solomon met with a frightful accident near Thompson Falls, Montana, and it seems almost a miracle that the little one was not killed outright.

The child was playing with other children near an open well, when she got too near the edge, and fell in. The well is seventy-eight feet deep, with about two feet of water in the bottom.

The little girl landed on her feet in the water. In spite

of the fact that one leg and one arm were broken by the fall, the baby stood up in the water until help was secured from a near-by railroad camp, which took about twenty minutes.

She was brought to town and taken to the hospital, where she now is, and her chances for recovery are good.

Saying "Chicken" Expensive.

An opinion was filed in the supreme court by Justice Trenchard, sustaining a verdict of \$1,072.79, recovered by Miss Helen Hoff, of Bayonne, New Jersey, against the Public Service Railway Company, because a crowd of drunken men on a car of the company called her a "chicken" and struck her in a brawl. Justice Trenchard declares that public carriers are at all times bound to protect their patrons, and that in this case the required protection was not given.

"Fetches Cows" with Auto.

"Pretty soft, I say; pretty soft!" ejaculated a traveling man, jitneying from Pontiac to Drayton Plains, Michigan, as a young farmer, comfortably seated in a modish roadster, leisurely drove a herd of Holstein cows along the road for the evening milking. "That's up-to-date farming for you, all right," agreed another passenger in the jitney. The jitney driver explained that the young fellow in the roadster was a wealthy farmer of the district, who always used his motor car to "fetch the cows."

Shows Two-headed Calf.

Fleming, of Camden-on-Gauley, Webster County, West Virginia, is owner of the freak of all freaks, in the way of a double-headed calf. It was born on Glade Creek, Nicholas County; its mother being a full-blooded Durham and its sire a Polled Angus. The monstrosity has four eyes and two mouths, and can eat with either mouth; can bawl in a fine tone from one mouth and in a coarse tone from the other; has two well-developed sets of teeth, is perfect in health, very playful, and drinks three quarts of milk at each meal.

The owner has a standing offer of twenty thousand dollars for the calf at six months of age. It is about twelve weeks old now.

Bill Fisher, of Sutton, is exhibiting the marvel through the county. He had it at Clarksburg the day of the big circus, and later will start on a general tour with it.

Forced to Circle Globe.

Charles J. Vopicka, of Chicago, American minister to Serbia, Bulgaria, and Roumania, is preparing to leave Washington in continuation of his globe-circling trip from Bukharest to Jassy, cities usually nine hours' distance from each other.

The minister was in Bukharest when the Germans took the city, and was not allowed to pass the lines to his station at Jassy. In order to resume his duties in Roumania, he found it necessary to cross Austria-Hungary and Germany and embark for America. His route now lies across the Pacific and through Siberia and Russia.

Dan O'Leary Does Century Hike.

Dan O'Leary, the famous old-time pedestrian, celebrated his seventy-fifth birthday by finishing a one-hundred-mile hike in twenty-three hours and fifty-two minutes. He

had wagered that he would be able to complete the distance in twenty-four hours.

Starting at nine o'clock on a Saturday night, in Forest Park, a Chicago amusement place, O'Leary continually "hit the trail" until eight-fifty-two o'clock Sunday night.

All during Sunday thousands of people turned out to witness the remarkable effort of the veteran walker. Dan says he will celebrate his one hundredth birthday with another century hike.

Sir Herbert Tree Has Passed Beyond.

Sir Herbert Tree is dead, the result of a collapse so sudden that he died in a few moments. Sir Herbert had discussed business affairs daily until his death with Mr. Dana, his business manager.

Sir Herbert, a popular figure on the stage in London for nearly forty years, was the best known in the United States of the English actor-managers. He appeared in America last winter, when he made a tour of the principal cities. He was one of the greatest of present-day Shakespearean actors.

Thirteen Suffragists Jailed.

Thirteen members of the National Woman's party, including Mrs. Helena Hill Weed, a daughter of Representative Hill, of Connecticut; and Miss Iris Calderhead, a daughter of former Representative Calderhead, of Kansas, were arrested recently at the White House gates.

Their suffrage banners were torn from them, and all thirteen, having refused to give bail, were taken to the house of detention pending their trial. Twelve of the women will be charged with violating the district police regulations against obstructing the sidewalk.

Farmers Capture "Wild" Bear

Farmers near Sheridan, Oregon, have brought to a successful conclusion a real wild-bear hunt. The big bruin's hide is stretched on a barn door. The whole countryside had been aroused by the beast's presence. Now G. A. Brown, of Dalles, is advertising twenty-five dollars reward for the return alive of his pet bear, that he says will come when called by whistling.

Spider's Bite Proves Fatal.

Mrs. Mary Karn, fifty-five, of Hoopeston, Illinois, is dead as the result of a spider bite received five months ago. Her finger was only slightly bitten, and since that time she submitted to five operations. In the last one her left arm was amputated at the shoulder. The shock of this operation resulted in her death. Blood poisoning was the basic cause.

Brakes Mysteriously Opened.

Seven loaded freight cars, on which brakes were loosened in some manner, coasted out of the railroad yards at Mohave, California, jumped a derailing switch, and went wild twelve miles down grade to Rosamond, where they crashed into the rear of southbound Southern Pacific train No. 8 from San Francisco, smashed the rear sleeper, overturned two others, and piled themselves high in wreckage.

The seven freight cars were all heavily loaded. Two contained ore. They were awaiting the making up of a train, and were supposed to have been locked by their

brakes, as the yards are on a down grade. In addition, they were so placed as to run into a derailing device if started by accident.

No. 8, due at Mohave at two-thirty-eight a. m., had just reached the outskirts of Rosamond, when the wild freight cars caught up with it and crashed into the rear end.

Two sleeping cars were pushed off the track and a third was lifted and landed squarely astraddle one of the freight cars, its line of length being at right angles to the car beneath.

Passengers were in the three cars, but none was injured.

A porter in the car which landed on top of the freight car was cut and bruised slightly.

J. W. Mingus, a brakeman, had a shoulder dislocated.

Ore, grain, and gravel constituted the cargo of the seven wild cars. The freight was scattered for many yards about the scene of the wreck and the freight cars were badly smashed.

The washing out of three hundred feet of track near Little Lake by the bursting of the Los Angeles aqueduct held back wrecking crews from the south.

Must be Tried for Murder.

Miss Grace Lusk, high-school teacher, of Waukesha, Wisconsin, was held responsible by a coroner's jury for the death of Mrs. Mary Newman Roberts, wife of Doctor David Roberts, for love of whom Miss Lusk shot his wife and then attempted suicide. The jury held that Mrs. Roberts "came to her death as a result of two pistol shots from a special caliber automatic pistol," and directed that "Miss Grace Lusk be held for trial for such shooting."

Wild Rides of Ghost Girl.

A golden-haired girl, dressed in white silk and wildly riding a pure-white colt, was caught late at night in Abington, a wealthy suburb of Philadelphia. Frightened villagers, who thought her a ghost, had telephoned the police to intercept her flight.

"I'm joy riding," she told the Abington police. She declared she couldn't remember her name and address, and a silver card case in her pocket bore only the name "Jessie Melon." Her clothes were of rich texture. She wore several valuable rings and gave every evidence of refinement.

Physicians called by the police on the theory that a fall from the horse had caused the lapse of memory could find no sign of injury and could give no solution of the mystery.

Where Crawfish Are a Pest.

Crawfish are such a pest in certain sections of Mississippi and Alabama that crops are sometimes destroyed in a night.

In badly infested areas from eight thousand to twelve thousand burrows have been found to the acre.

How dense the crawfish are may be judged by one farmer's experience. In a season on one plantation there were picked up twenty-seven barrels of crawfish.

Hen Egg Marked with Coffin.

L. W. Fine, a farmer living near Caldwell, Texas, created something of a sensation by exhibiting a hen egg that had a perfect coffin pictured on one side of it and the figures "8" and "27," also seven stars, on the other

side. Some claimed they could plainly see a capital K outlined on the coffin. The egg was spckled where not otherwise marked.

Mr. Fine noticed the egg immediately when he went to gather eggs early one morning, and was greatly surprised, upon closer examination, to find these markings upon it.

It was such a rare curiosity, he resolved to exhibit it in town. It is still here, and attracting much attention.

Conscripts for Marriage.

In the same thought with war, consider marriage. There are, for instance, too many eligible bachelors escaping to the trenches, according to a clique of Brooklyn girls. And they are doing their best to conserve the dignity of matrimony.

"Every soldier should be married," is the slogan of the new club.

Its name is the League for Selective Matrimonial Conscription, and its chief is Miss Dorothy Brooks.

She has asked all the winsome little Brooklyn misses to register as matrimonial conscripts, and, after divers shapes, figures, and shades of beauty have been registered, the club members will make a drive on the ranks of the army.

Twenty-seven Chickens from Fifteen Eggs.

A chicken fancier of Sharon, Pennsylvania, has four Plymouth Rock hens that lay double-yolked eggs. He figured that if he could get one chicken from a single-yolked egg, he ought to get two from the others.

The result was surprising. Out of fifteen eggs he got twenty-seven chickens. In several cases there were double chickens. Two had two heads, one had four legs, and another had four legs and two heads. Two were joined together by a piece of skin.

The owner of these freak chickens now thinks he has a breed of chickens that will lay nothing but double-yolked eggs.

Young Wife Enlists.

Mrs. Harold Anshen, twenty-two years old, of 398 Clinton Avenue, Newark, New Jersey, has joined the Naval Reserve as clerk. Mrs. Anshen decided to be of service to the government after it became known that her husband had been drafted. The young woman asserted that if her husband could be of service to the country, she could, too. Accordingly she applied to the Third Naval District, in New York.

After her husband's draft number, five hundred and sixty-four, was published, Mrs. Anshen was informed that she had been appointed a clerk in the navy department. The young woman is a graduate of the New Brunswick High School, and her husband, who is manager of the Newark branch of a large printing concern, is a graduate of Rutgers College.

Rich Missouri Farmer Slain.

R. D. Limbaugh, a wealthy farmer, who resides a half mile south of Arbyrd, twenty miles south of Kennett, Missouri, was shot and instantly killed by his stepson, William S. Potter, aged fifteen.

Sheriff J. E. Hardin and Coroner Doctor E. F. Harrison held an inquest recently, the verdict of the jury placing the responsibility for the killing on young Potter.

and recommending that Potter's brother, Paul, twenty-four, be held as an accessory.

The cause of the killing, according to the evidence brought out at the inquest, was the result of a family row, started by Paul Potter and taken up by other members of the family against Limbaugh.

The mother of the boys took sides with them. During the quarrel, a fight ensued between Paul and the slain man.

William Potter went to a neighbor's house and procured a shotgun. As he approached the house on his return, Limbaugh, seeing that he was in danger, turned to run, and, as he did so, William shot at him. The load of buckshot struck Limbaugh in the back of the head, a little to the right, tearing away practically half of his head.

William Potter is held on a charge of first-degree murder, and his brother Paul as an accessory. They were both brought back here this afternoon by Sheriff Hardin, and are now in jail.

Town One-third Destroyed.

One-third of the business section of Mohave, including the post office, a newspaper office, the telephone exchange, and a telegraph office, were wholly destroyed by fire. A stranger, giving the name of J. O. Day, said by the authorities to have admitted he was in the building of the Mohave *Press*, where the fire started, was arrested.

Otto Haes, the postmaster, entered the burning post office in an attempt to save a bag of mail, and was caught under falling timbers. He was dragged to safety by firemen after his feet had been seriously burned.

The buildings burned included the office of the Mohave *Press*, the post office, a building containing the Mohave telephone exchange and a confectionery store, the miners' union hall, and the Postal Telegraph office. Aside from a few effects in the confectionery store, nothing in any of the buildings was saved. The loss is estimated to be between twenty-five thousand dollars and thirty thousand dollars.

According to the officers, Day was left in charge of the Mohave *Press* office by W. J. Evans, the editor, who left town for a vacation a few hours before the fire was discovered. Day was arrested, the officers said, as he was walking along the railroad, away from town. It was also asserted by the officers that they discovered that a fire hydrant across from the burned buildings had been tampered with.

Day, the officers said, admitted responsibility for the fire, but maintained it was the result of the accidental dropping of a lamp in a bucket of gasoline. He denied having touched the fire hydrant, they said.

Portrait Painter Shot by Farmer.

Frank B. McCarthy, thirty-eight years old, a portrait painter, was shot three times in his room at Hotel Garni, Jefferson Avenue and Olive Street, St. Louis, by Fred W. Schaefer, fifty-three years old, a farmer of West Port, Tennessee, with whom he was quarreling over the possession of a check for fifty dollars, which, he told the police McCarthy had taken from him, and which was found in Schaefer's pocket after his arrest.

McCarthy was taken to the City Hospital, where it was said he was in a serious condition. Schaefer was taken to Central Police Station.

According to the police, Schaefer and McCarthy were drinking in the latter's room. Schaefer, according to his own statement, gave McCarthy the check, which was signed by E. M. Menick and made payable to him. When Schaefer demanded the check, McCarthy, he said, denied ever having it or knowing anything about it. He admits firing the shots.

Schaefer said that McCarthy had got about thirty dollars from him besides the check.

Man Plays Solitaire Twelve Hours.

One evening, after supper, Hosea Munger, of Long Ridge, New Jersey, secured a pack of playing cards, seated himself at the parlor table, and started playing solitaire. At ten o'clock Mrs. Munger entered the parlor and said she was going to retire. Munger announced that he had played for two hours and had not won a game, and that he would play until he won if he had to play all night.

Mrs. Munger retired. At midnight she called to her husband, who answered that he had not won. At six o'clock the next morning Mrs. Munger went to the parlor and found Mr. Munger still playing the game. He said he had not won, and that he would play until he was victorious.

Mrs. Munger happened to look under the table, stooped down, and picked up four cards which she gave to her husband.

Munger played all night with forty-eight cards. He states that he will play again with a full pack of cards, and will play until he wins.

Teachers and Pupils Wear Gas Masks.

Schools in caves, with pupils and teachers wearing gas masks, are extremes to which war-ridden France has gone to insure for every child "that heritage in which alone is the prophecy of an enduring nation." This is the official report to the regents of the University of the State of New York by John L. Finley, president of the university and state commissioner of education, who recently returned from France, where he studied the effect of the war upon the French school system.

"France has not for one moment forgotten her culture defense," said President Finley. "Women by thousands have taken the places of men teachers called to the front, many of whom, incapacitated for battle, have returned to teach."

President Finley specially sought the advice of France in meeting like conditions here. This advice, summed up, is:

"Do not let the needs of the hour, however heavily they fall upon the men and women of the day, permit neglect of the defenses of to-morrow. Sacrifice everything to bequeath the spirit that has made the institutions which we would preserve and enlarge in our children."

Doctor Finley urged the United States to take time to prepare against exhaustion of our technical skill and professional equipment.

Except to make place for physical training in her schools, which is not yet generally prescribed or enforced, President Finley said there is little change in the French curriculum. France, after an unsuccessful experiment fifteen years ago, withdrew military training from her public schools.

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We give herewith a list of some of the back numbers in print. You can have your news dealer order them or they will be sent direct by the publishers to any address upon receipt of the price in money or postage stamps.

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